

**The Lives and Works of the Women Artists at the Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead in
Late Victorian and Edwardian England.**

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The following has been
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Illustrations on pages
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Abstract

The lives of three female and one male artist working at the Della Robbia Pottery in Birkenhead are the subjects of a case study located in Liverpool. The case study examines the larger issues concerning the employment of women, particularly working and middle-class women, in the decorative arts in late Victorian and Edwardian England. The findings are analysed in the light of interpretative models employed by feminist historians, particularly the view that women's professional involvement and access to training was shaped and constrained by ideologies of gender. The study examines the extent to which the academic institutions, which provided the training, institutionalised ideologies of appropriate feminine activity in their admission procedures, availability of classes, and financial barriers to participation. Blackburne House School, the Liverpool School of Art, The University Art Sheds and the Sandon School of Art are the main institutions studied. The structure of the work place, as defined by the Della Robbia Pottery, is analysed for gendered patterns in the division of labour. The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the context of current debate amongst art historians is referenced to the experiences of both the male and female employees at the pottery. The functions of exhibitions are examined in the light of their importance to the development of women's professional advancement. Two important movements integral to women's history, Socialism and Suffragism were found to exist at the pottery and their effect on the artists' lives are investigated. Finally the workings of the Victorian and Edwardian art world are demonstrated through the activities of the Liverpool Positivist Church which had a strong presence at the Della Robbia Pottery.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The words *Della Robbia* are usually associated with the productions of the Florentine family working in one of the most famous periods in art history, that of the Italian Renaissance. Rarely are they associated with industrial Merseyside and in particular with the late nineteenth century dock area of Birkenhead. This location was far removed from the splendour of Florence but nevertheless was home to a pottery factory also known by the title of *Della Robbia*. It is with the Birkenhead *Della Robbia* pottery that this thesis is concerned or rather the experiences of the women workers who were such an important feature of the pottery. The Birkenhead pottery founded in 1894, was the brainchild of Harold Rathbone and Conrad Dressler.¹ Prominence is usually given to Harold Rathbone rather than to Conrad Dressler where commentaries are made on the pottery since Conrad Dressler worked for the company for only three years of its twelve-year existence, leaving to set up his own pottery at Medmenham in Buckinghamshire. Harold was a member of the well-known Rathbone family who early in the eighteenth century had established themselves as successful merchants, in the rapidly growing port of Liverpool.

The founder of the Della Robbia Pottery was trained as an artist under Legros at the Slade and under Bouguereau at the *Academie Julian* in Paris.² As a young man, he spent three years as a pupil of Ford Madox Brown during the period Brown was occupied in painting the murals in Manchester Town Hall. (Harold was the model for the figure of John of Gaunt in the mural.)³ There are many reasons, some obvious others less so, why Harold chose to set up his pottery. One of the most important was his great admiration of the Pre-Raphaelites and of William Morris and the philosophy of the associated Arts and Crafts Movement. This was reinforced by his personal connections with this group of artists. His father, Philip Rathbone, was Chairman of the Arts and Exhibitions Sub-Committee (from 1886-1895) of the Walker Art Gallery and under his guidance Liverpool had led the way in the purchase of Pre-Raphaelite works when the rest of the country was still disdainful and derogatory about their work. Harold himself recounted how he often accompanied

his father on his excursions to London to negotiate the purchase of these paintings:

About this period I used to accompany my father on his visits to the studios of the various of our leading painters in his annual errand of acquiring the best works he could lay his hand on for the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition.....⁴

There was also practical support and encouragement from this same group of Pre-Raphaelites in setting up the pottery. Holman Hunt was one of the signatories on the Articles of Memorandum as was George Frederick Watts. William Morris along with Alma Tadema and Lord Leighton were quoted in the 1894 Catalogue as approving the venture.⁵ Finally one of the most important reasons is that he himself indicated that Donatello and Luca Della Robbia were two of his favourite sculptors.⁶ It can be seen quite clearly therefore if one were to set up a studio pottery, the choice of the Della Robbia model is one that a young man from Harold's background might make. The emphasis of production was to be architectural faience wares as in the company's Italian Renaissance namesake in conjunction with some domestic wares. The fact that the company did not survive for more than twelve years has many reasons. Few of these reasons have any connection with the issues to be raised by this thesis, though they have been investigated in detail in an earlier work.⁷ It is sufficient to say that Harold did not inherit the family acumen for business. His eccentricity, naivety, foolishness and sensitivity left him unable and unsuitable to cope with the economic decline that occurred in Edwardian England. (See illustration 1 of a photograph of Harold).

The Della Robbia Pottery may not be the best known example of the decorative arts workshops of the period but it attracted a lot of contemporary attention. This was partly to do with the social connections the Rathbone family had and partly as a result of the striking character of the wares themselves. It continues to do so to day in the form of the demand for, and financial standing, of the works which occasionally come up at auction. None of these factors are significant reasons why the company merits detailed academic research. These are far subtler. The Della Robbia Pottery Company itself and its workforce were subjected to certain influences; some of the same influences have been a

source of debate for many years amongst art historians. It is the questions raised in this context that my thesis proposes to try and answer. The use of the experiences of a small, comparatively undocumented section of an art community as a case study may well open up the debate on what the norm was for such art communities. In particular it may allow us to test out the extent to which current assumptions, based largely on metropolitan studies, may be challenged by detailed study of provincial groups.⁸ Some of these assumptions relate specifically to female artists. The importance attributed to the women at the Birkenhead Pottery further reinforces the suitability of the pottery as a case study to investigate some of these issues.

Harold chose to site his factory in the rapidly expanding town of Birkenhead. Its population was comparatively well off, the town having become a pleasant haven for the wealthy Liverpool merchants. Pleasing architecture, a square and park designed by Joseph Paxton all added to its desirability, as well as being served by all the modern means of transport of the late Victorian era. Perhaps most importantly, there was a ready work force available locally with the artistic skills needed for such a project. In common with many of the large commercial potteries and the smaller studio ones, the backbone of the artistic work force was female. Approximately eighty marks of individual workers at the Della Robbia Pottery have been identified. Twenty cannot be attributed to specific individuals, and some of the marks belong to artists employed on a commission basis. Of the remaining marks, twenty-three are known to belong to the female artists. Most importantly the works of some of these women are considered by today's art collectors, art market and art critics to be the most desirable of the company's productions.

These female artists were obviously not lacking in talent; moreover this must have been trained talent. Designing and decorating pottery requires more than just a basic grounding in art because of the way the materials used change chemically and react to heat. Where and how did these women acquire their skills? What was their status in the pottery? In a society that still expected and demanded codes of socially acceptable behaviour from women and where feminist art historians have emphasised the patriarchal dominance of

the institutions that offered both education and employment, where do these women fit into the nationally accepted scene?⁹ The first major question then to be addressed in this research was to re-examine the debates and arguments on art education in the light of the experiences of the women at the Della Robbia Pottery, in particular in the context of the arguments highlighted in the works of art historians such as Deborah Cherry, Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock.¹⁰ Gender issues tend to dominate their perspective of opportunities in art education as for example in Deborah Cherry's work:

But whatever the differences of provision, public and private schools were united in the priority they gave to organising art education in terms of sexual difference. This differentiation between artists simply on the grounds of sex was constantly put in play in the institutions and discourses of art – from the art schools, which controlled professional training to the art societies, which awarded validation and distinction.¹¹

Linda Nochlin approached this same theme by asking the question, "Why have there been no great women artists?"¹² She concluded that there had been no great women artists in this period because the production of great art occurs "in a social situation..... determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast."¹³ In other words the institutions of art education and training were responsible for there being no great women artists, not the lack of ability or talent.

Historically there is sense of marginalisation, of deliberate attempts to preclude women from institutions and of social condemnation of those who tried to fight the system. It is true that throughout most of the nineteenth century art education had been a contentious issue at all levels of society. From a government perspective, there was fear that the nation was falling behind the Continent in its manufacturing industries due to a dearth of designers who were able to translate industry's needs into art and vice versa. The institutions responsible for providing the education and training could not agree on the content and method of teaching. The industrialists who needed these services could not commit themselves to supporting, either morally or financially, the art schools. This

reluctance arose out of their fear of industrial espionage and rivalry with other companies.¹⁴ Even the students themselves, modern art historians tell us, appear to have been unhappy about the opportunities and quality of opportunities offered to them in Great Britain. But by far the most significant aspect of the issues surrounding art education for the art historian is that of the position of women. The Della Robbia Pottery with its high proportion of talented women artists provides an admirable case study through which to re-examine the question of women's art education and training in the later half of the nineteenth century. This was the first major area of research in the thesis.

Following on naturally from education is the question of employment opportunities for artists, and in particular those involved in the decorative arts. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the female population outnumbered the male by nearly one million. It was estimated that three out of six million adult women supported themselves and dependent relatives and therefore needed to earn a living.¹⁵ On the other hand there were only a few occupations considered socially acceptable to middle-class women in Victorian society. This applied to both single and married women. Many of these professions revolved around teaching or being governesses. For working class women the situation appeared even bleaker and one where the rules of what was considered appropriate were inverted. In some industries certain female tasks were more physically demanding and demeaning than men's work but at the same time considered suitable for women to do. This appears to have been particularly so in the potting industry where women worked as "wedgers" and carriers of upwards of seventy five pounds of clay."¹⁶ Jacqueline Sarsby graphically illustrates this point in her book *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Female Workers in the Potteries*.¹⁷

At the other end of the spectrum women "working" in the fine arts were generally from the aristocracy or the middle classes. In the aristocracy, the women had the financial independence to be engaged in their chosen occupation but at the same time, with rare exceptions, they were classified as amateurs. This classification deliberately obscured the social stigma of earning a living. Many artists from the upper middle classes either had the

spirit and confidence to ignore these social mores, artists like Barbara Bodichon or Anna Mary Howitt or they were directly related to male artists, like Lady Butler (Elizabeth Thompson) and could hide behind their protection. This phenomenon has been demonstrated by writers such as Ellen Clayton in the 1880's and Julia Parker in the 1980s in their use of collective biographies.¹⁸ One occupation that was generally considered socially acceptable and one at the same time allowed women to earn a living was that of designer or decorator in the ceramic industry. It is for this reason that the Della Robbia Pottery is an appropriate case study to use when examining the second main area of this thesis, women and work opportunities.

Although there was a major technical difference between the pottery created in Florence and that in Birkenhead, a factor common to both productions was the philosophy of the individual freedom of creation.¹⁹ This philosophy was enshrined in the Arts and Crafts Movement; its Victorian origins being attributed to William Morris. In theory the application of this philosophy to the workplace should have resulted in the artist taking full control and responsibility for their work from conception of design to completion of the work. For this reason some historians also attribute the Arts and Crafts Movement as the catalyst to furthering the cause of women's professional development in art. It is seen as instrumental in furthering their opportunities by obviating some of the male dominance of the creative aspects of the art. In companies not in sympathy with the ethos of the Arts and Crafts Movement, creativity was perceived as being stifled by assigning certain tasks to women based on their biological traits. In other words traits aligned to femininity and domesticity and the consequential suitability of females to carry them out were seen as central to the art production for most of the nineteenth century. The philosophy underpinning the Arts and Craft Movement challenged this ideology by stating there should not be a separation of the work processes but that one individual should have the responsibility of production from conception of design to completion of the work. Theoretically women would have the opportunity to be more creative and to use their talents. This debate can be followed in the works of Lynne Walker, Cheryl Buckley and Gillian Naylor.²⁰ Contemporary and modern commentaries on Rathbone's company

emphasise the Arts and Crafts aspect of its production.²¹ This is not only the current perception of the Company but as Gillian Naylor has pointed out, it was also a contemporary one: "More in keeping with the "Aesthetic" principles and highly regarded in the Arts and Crafts as well as in aristocratic circles, was the Della Robbia Pottery...."²² Given its strong links with the Arts and Crafts Movement, the experiences of the Birkenhead women are eminently suitable as case studies to examine the philosophy of this movement and how in reality it was translated into the workplace. This was the third major area of research in the thesis.

An interesting phenomenon that arose in the preliminary research undertaken was the relationship in the area of employment between the function of the fine arts and the decorative arts. Many women who worked in the decorative arts took advantage of exhibitions such as that of the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition in Liverpool to submit their own works. These exhibits would be classified as fine art rather than the decorative art; the area of the arts that they spent their daily lives engaged in. The obvious question is why? Was it to relax after a hard day at the pottery? Was it to earn extra money? Or was it because these workers had ambitions that their educational, economic and social status denied them? Or was it because those with the talent and training to work in the fine arts could only sustain a living through the decorative arts? Many established women artists whose primary work was categorised as fine art, women like Laura Knight, or indeed men like Burne-Jones took direct commissions in the potteries. Their motives for taking these commissions in the decorative arts were very different to the women who worked full-time in the industry.

Often the men and the women from both branches of the arts started off their education in the Schools of Design, artists like Bernard Meninsky or Kate Greenaway. Some of these students went on to win travelling scholarships to study in Paris as in the case of two Liverpool students Phoebe McCleish and Mary McCrossan. One had a successful career in the decorative arts, the other in the fine arts. Others like Katie Fisher a young student in Liverpool, who consistently won medals for her work, ended up working in a tapestry

company in Warrington. It is obvious that having talent alone did not determine the eventual outcome of the students' careers, precisely what factors did was an area examined in this thesis. Indications of success and fame are often to be found in exhibition reports and exhibition catalogues. The mechanism used therefore specifically to investigate the trends of career structure was to analyse the function of exhibitions. Harold Rathbone was prolific in obtaining exhibition space for his pottery and there is strong evidence that his women workers exhibited in their own right. Using reports of the Della Robbia Exhibits in contemporary magazines, newspapers and exhibition catalogues proved to be an area rich in analysis. This was to be the fourth area of major research in the thesis.

Returning to Linda Nochlin's premise that the development of individual artists takes place in the confines of social institutions, it would be hard to ignore two major social movements that coincided with the life span of the Della Robbia Pottery namely Suffragism and Socialism. These areas have previously remained outside the remit of any commentaries on the Birkenhead Pottery. This has been due primarily to two reasons. The first reason being that biographical and documentary evidence on the lives of the Della Robbia workers is sparse. The second that previous commentators have predominantly limited themselves to the confines of the artistic productions themselves and within the general context of the period. Detailed examination of the impact of Socialism and Suffragism at the Della Robbia Pottery requires not only intensive archival research but also an interdisciplinary approach. Given that these two movements have had some of the greatest influences on women's lives it would be impossible to ignore them in an analysis of influences on women artists. This was the fifth major area of research in the thesis.

Certain ceramic works produced at the Birkenhead Pottery bore inscriptions that relate to the Positivist Religion founded by Auguste Comte in the 1850s. It is well known by those engaged in philosophical research that Liverpool had a very strong and active membership of the Positivist Church. This strength was demonstrated not only in the social and

academic standing of their membership but also in the actual church building. Their church, known as the Temple of Humanity, was situated in the heart of the city. Part of Comtean Philosophy is concerned with the role of art in society, one of the important reasons artists were attracted to the Movement. Another aspect of Comtean Philosophy is that of the role of women both in their church but also in society. This role appears at first to be one of subservience and one which women artists would not find appealing given their pioneering reputation in forwarding the women's cause. It therefore seemed appropriate to try and discover what the membership of the church was at the pottery and how, if it did, influence the women. In particular to examine how and if, two seemingly opposite facets of an artist's personality could cohabit side by side. This proved to be the sixth major area of research and one of the most fascinating in the thesis.

The questions raised in the previous paragraphs could not be answered without placing them in the boundaries of recognisable methodologies. Out of necessity a variety of methodological approaches have been used. The origins of this research work lie in my many visits to see the Della Robbia pottery housed in some of our major national museums such as Dublin, Cork, Glasgow, The Victoria and Albert, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham and the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead. With rare exceptions, the names of some of the artists of the individual pieces, are all the information available to the viewer. This is not the result of museum élitism but because of ignorance. Like so many artists of the decorative arts of the period, in particular the female artists, they are a hidden or anonymous group. Like its Florentine namesake, the Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery will be familiar in form and context to those connoisseurs of Arts and Crafts ceramics. What will not be so familiar are the names attached to the works themselves. The museum labels do not usually have any other than the barest of facts, not even dates of birth or death, simply because they are not known. In some cases not even a name is given. These individual art workers are the cores of my research. It is possible that if their works of art had perhaps been classified as fine art, they might not have remained "dead". In attempting to answer some of the questions raised in this introduction, I also hope to "resurrect" these same artists. The fact that their work

has survived in comparatively large numbers but nevertheless in anonymity was the precursor to all the questions I have raised in the preceding paragraphs. Their biographies based on empirical research will serve as case studies to contextualize all the other research.

The initial stages of the work necessitated focusing on acquiring biographical information on three women and one man. The individuals chosen were Cassandra Annie Walker, Ruth Bare, Marian de Caluwé and Charles Collis. There were some common factors in choosing these four artists. All four are acknowledged as having produced some of the best work at the pottery both by contemporary commentators and current. In addition the three women independently submitted works classified as fine art to the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibitions over a number of years. Very little was known about the women thus ensuring that there were no preconceived assumptions to prejudice the research. Gender issues feature very highly in art histories on this period: the inclusion therefore of a male artist was necessary to compare the experiences of the women alongside the men. This was to establish whether the experiences the women underwent were also common to men in the same socio-economic class or the result of living in what has become known as a patriarchal society. Men who did not succeed as artists have generally been ignored in history, the reasons for the failure of female artists being considered more important. Feminist theory by definition would also tend to exclude this group of male artists.

A very important factor, common to the four individuals, was that they all were either born in the Liverpool area or spent a substantial period of their life there. Some basic information in the Williamson Museum Art Gallery archives pinpointed areas that could be investigated. It was known for example that Cassandra Walker and Ruth Bare had attended classes at Liverpool University College of Applied Art and that Charles Collis may have received some of his art training at the Burslem School of Art in Stoke-on-Trent or the Laird School of Art in Birkenhead. Nothing at all was known about Marian de Caluwé other than she was the wife of Emile de Caluwé. Emile, who owned a

monumental masonry company, went into partnership with Harold Rathbone in 1900 in order to prevent the Della Robbia Pottery going into insolvency. Ruth Bare was the daughter of Harold Bloomfield Bare, a well-known Liverpool architect. Her inclusion fitted into the premise advocated by many art historians that successful female artists usually had the advantage of coming from a family of male artists. Thus all four subjects fitted into the various categories defined by and of interest to art historians.

The biographical information was obtained by drawing on evidence of birth, marriage and death registers, wills, census returns, local newspapers and street and trade directories. This was important in revealing their marital status, family background and true social class. Research of this type is often confined to family historians searching out their own origins and rarely seen as a basis for true academic research. However without this approach it would have been impossible to pursue the questions raised in this introduction and any research would have been meaningless.²³

The knowledge gained through this section of the empirical investigation made it possible to use the case studies in the context of the examination of larger national issues concerning the education and employment opportunities of women engaged in the decorative arts in the latter half of Victorian England. This could only be analysed in the light of interpretative models employed by feminist historians, particularly the view that women's professional involvement and access to training was shaped and constrained by ideologies of gender. However, four case studies in one small factory in the North of England are insufficient to draw any valid conclusions about an important national industry. To avoid any imbalance in the outcome of the research, additional methodologies needed to be used.

The method that was deemed most appropriate to use was that of collective biography. The histories of a number of well-known male and female workers in other potteries as well as those from the Della Robbia Pottery were used in this way as a control group. Collective biography as a methodology lends itself very easily to both quantitative and

qualitative analysis and is a way of using a large amount of information in the most economic way. Obviously there had to be some logic in the choice of which artist potters were to be included in the collective biography, given that the pottery industry was a major industry in the nineteenth century and that it employed vast numbers. The studio potteries, in which the artists worked, had to have had some common strata. These were identified as ones which produced art pottery; where the arts and crafts philosophy was paramount and where there was an acknowledged group of females whose work has stood the test of time and where this work is currently on display in our national museums. The factories chosen were Pilkington's Lancastrian Pottery, based in Manchester and the Royal Doulton Company based in Stoke-on-Trent. The latter factory, although it ran a very large commercial section, did have a renowned and well-documented art pottery department.

Sources for the research on the Della Robbia Pottery could have been a major problem since very few primary sources had been identified or thought to exist and where secondary sources are almost non-existent. The lack of known primary sources has the obvious drawback for research but the dearth of secondary sources brought with it a more complex problem. It is more difficult to contextualize conclusions reached from your research if there is nothing to contextualize with. The body of this work is focused on art in Liverpool and the secondary sources on the subject, for example that of Jane Sellars focus on the fine arts.²⁴ Even Quentin Bell in his work on the Schools of Design only makes a one line comment on that of Liverpool.²⁵ This dilemma in the end proved to be the real essence of the research.

The last important aspect of methodology used in this thesis was one that has been and continues to be one of the major causes why history often needs to be rewritten. This is the methodology of using a local study that is then placed in the context of the national perspective. One of the most effective studies of this kind was that undertaken by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris on the role of working class women in the Suffrage Movement.²⁶ This thesis in essence uses a local study to examine national issues and

hopefully in some way contributes towards the body of knowledge in women's art history. More importantly the study also helps to improve the knowledge of male artists of the period who did not have the financial means or patronage to survive as independent artists do.

As already pointed out the lack of sources could have meant that this research might not have proceeded beyond the initial investigations. The pivot was whether I could find the very basic biographical details of the artists and from these build up my research. This aspect of the work was painstakingly slow but successful and very exciting. It also continued throughout all the period of research. Often the new information found resulted in dramatic changes in the development of the proposed arguments. In many ways the research took on the profile of a "criminal investigation" in the sense that new facts led to others. Most importantly these facts led to the discovery of surviving relatives of two of the female artists and all the benefits of their "oral tradition" that helped to fill some of the missing gaps in the history of the pottery. Not only did "oral tradition" contribute to my research but also these same relatives were able to provide original documentation and photographs. A known surviving niece of Harold Rathbone had never been interviewed about her uncle and she was able to provide many personal memories of the Rathbone family. Ultimately the original lack of primary sources was remedied and proved to be no longer a stumbling block to valid research on the artists of the Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead.

In conclusion there are six main areas to be addressed in the following chapters, in relation to the artistic community in Liverpool. The first chapter deals with the availability and the assessment of the quality of art education in Liverpool for both men and women during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century. The second chapter looks at employment opportunities in the field of art for those who had received their education in Liverpool. The third chapter focuses on the influences of the Arts and Crafts Movement at the Della Robbia Pottery in determining the employment and status of women. Exhibitions are the subject of the fourth chapter and the functions they had in relation to

advancing or hindering women's professional art careers. The fifth chapter investigates whether the artists at the Della Robbia Pottery were affected in any way by the two movements of Socialism and Suffragism. The sixth and final chapter asks questions concerning the involvement of the Liverpool art community in the Church of Humanity and its associated Comtean Philosophy. All the chapters use the experiences of the women artists at the Della Robbia Pottery and in so doing reconstruct the biographies of women who have lain hidden from history.

Illustration 1. Photograph of Harold Rathbone by Fred Hollyer circa 1892. In private ownership.

Notes Chapter One.

¹ See David Hillhouse, *An Interim Report. Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906* (Birkenhead: Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, 1981). This publication is the major reference work on the pottery. In his introduction Hillhouse says, "The lack of written evidence left by the potters themselves has obscured the history of the Della Robbia Pottery," (Unpaginated). Some sources cite December 1893 as the foundation date of the pottery but this is the date of the Incorporation of the Articles of Memorandum of the Company. Production commenced in 1894.

² Harold Rathbone File, Walker Art Gallery Archives, Liverpool.

³ The murals were begun in 1879. It appears that Madox Brown was initially unenthusiastic about taking on Harold as a pupil but eventually did so for an annual payment of £200. See note in the Harold Rathbone File, Walker Art Gallery which refers to undated letters from Madox Brown to Lucy Madox Brown contained in *William Michael Rossetti Diary*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

⁴ Madox Hueffer, *Ford Madox Brown: A Record of his Life and Works* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896), 427.

⁵ Della Robbia Pottery Company Ltd., PRO BT31/5733, Public Records Office, Kew; 1894 *Catalogue of the Della Robbia Company*, Williamson Art Gallery Archives, Birkenhead.

⁶ Reference in Harold Rathbone File, Walker Art Gallery Archives, to a letter from Harold Rathbone to William Reid Dick, dated 11th April 1924, typed copy in Tate Gallery Archives.

⁷ Kathleen Hawley, *The Reasons for the Decline of the Della Robbia Pottery 1894-1906* (M. A. Dissertation, Oxford Brookes University, 1992).

⁸ The company has been the subject of various articles in magazines such as *The Studio* and *The Magazine of Art*. However they rarely focus on the pottery as a social institution or on the influences, which affected the lives of its work force. This also includes the most comprehensive source of information; the pamphlet by David Hillhouse published to accompany the 1981 Exhibition of Della Robbia at the Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

⁹ See L. Davidoff and C. Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

¹⁰ Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women, Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1987); Griselda Pollock, "Vision, Voice and Power: Feminist Art History and Marxism," *Block 6* (1982).

¹¹ Cherry, *Painting Women*, 64.

¹² Nochlin, *Women Art and Power and Other Essays*, 147.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁴ For a full discussion of these issues see Quentin Bell, *The Schools of Design* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

¹⁵ "Art Work for Women 2," *Art Journal* (April 1872): 103.

¹⁶ Cheryl Buckley, *Potters and Paintresses: Women Designers in the Pottery Industry 1870-1955* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), 23.

¹⁷ Jacqueline Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Work and at Home* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), 23-25.

¹⁸ Ellen Clayton, *English Female Artists* (London: Tinsley, 1876); Julia Parker, *Women and Welfare. Ten Victorian Women in Public Service* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988).

¹⁹ Florentine works used white tin glaze as a base colour enhancing the clarity and brightness of the polychrome colours added on top. The Birkenhead pottery used white slipware as a background, polychrome colours and completed with a clear lead glaze.

²⁰ On the question of design generally in the pottery industry see the first three chapters of Cheryl Buckley's thesis *Women Designers in the North Staffordshire Pottery Industry 1914-1940*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1991. In reference to the Arts and Crafts see also Buckley, *Potters and*

Paintresses, 1990; Lynne Walker, "The Arts and Crafts Alternative," in Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (eds.), *A View From the Interior* (London: The Women's Press, 1989); Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Studio Vista, 1971).

²¹For example Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 74.

²²Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 151.

²³Biographical information obtained in this way was responsible for reassessing the status of one of the most written about Pre-Raphaelite women, Lizzie Siddall and in consequence challenged many of the erroneous perceptions of her life. See Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, "Women as a Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Presentation of Elizabeth Siddall", *Art History* 7 (1984): 206-227.

²⁴Jane Sellars, *Women's Works* (Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1988).

²⁵Bell, *The Schools of Design*, 100.

²⁶See Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Virago, 1978).

CHAPTER TWO

Art Education for Women in Liverpool 1850-1910

Theories of art Education for Women

The simple title of this chapter belies one of the most complex issues of the nineteenth century, namely art education for both men and women of all social classes. These issues have been well documented by historians such as Quentin Bell and Stuart Macdonald in their work on the history of the Schools of Design and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, Charlotte Yeldham, Deborah Cherry and Sarah Dodd in their work on Victorian women artists.¹ The issues ranged from disagreements at Government level, to sabotage from industrialists who wanted to protect their private interests, to personal vendettas between leading artists on how art should be taught. Somewhere in the midst of this confusion, the question of women's education was periodically referred to. This was usually in the context of the problems they posed for male students as depicted in the 1846 report on the Schools of Design:

Women were a distraction, not only because they came from a class the schools were not supposed to serve but also because they used the schools as a convenient place to find husbands.²

This was obviously a common perception of female attendance at art colleges. Cecil Stewart in his history of the Manchester Regional College of Art also describes how the directors of that establishment were troubled by the enrolment of female students who were a "most unfortunate distraction to the opposite sex." This distraction led to the departure of large numbers of female students from the Art School who found matrimonial partners amongst the male art students. The direction to the staff to choose plainer female students to avoid losses did not work since they also had no difficulty in obtaining husbands.³

The confusion continues in modern accounts of the history of art education. There is acknowledgement that the situation had changed for the better at the end of the nineteenth century but interspersed with these acknowledgements are so many caveats that the inevitable question arises of what had changed in reality. Even more

significantly the reader begins to question what was the true position of the opportunities in art education for women throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Historical accounts leave the reader with a sense of despondency surrounding the subject of art training for both the male and female students. It is not only the gender and economic aspects that contribute to this feeling but even the style of teaching itself. Visions of talented students slavishly working for weeks on end to copy trivial works spring to mind, techniques like stipple being compulsory under the regimented and conformist South Kensington system; these same students longing to escape to the Paris or Antwerp Schools with their more sympathetic style of teaching. This scenario is one depicted in many art histories but was it true for many would-be artists in the latter half of the nineteenth century? Modern historians are more conscious of the way in which historical facts were often documented in the past. In particular that the information provided is often self-selected by the writer to propound personal opinions. Many of our perceptions of female art education originate from the writings of female avant-garde artists of this period; artists like Barbara Bodichon (1827-91), Mrs. Henrietta Rae (1859-1928) and Jessie Macgregor (1872-1904). Their experiences were not necessarily the norm given their personalities and family backgrounds.

Linda Nochlin, the American feminist art historian tried to analyze the subject of women's art education by using a different approach to other writers. In her essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* she acknowledges that there have been no great women artists.⁴ Unlike many feminist historians she does not try to justify the lack of greatness in semantic terms, namely that there were great female artists but that their greatness was denied by male art critics both contemporary and current. Rather she discusses the theory that achieving greatness was an impossibility for most women because the major pre-condition to attaining greatness was access to public institutions. These public institutions were founded, regulated and managed by males who deliberately excluded women from their domains. In other words no matter how much talent or genius women had, it was impossible for them to achieve artistic excellence on the same footing as men because they were denied the means to fulfil their potential. In this context public institutions meant art schools.

The focus of this chapter is on the development of the academic institutions for art training in the nineteenth and early twentieth century with particular references to gender issues but from the perspective of a local study. A local study seems a more appropriate tool to question the findings of research that normally relies on historical accounts from both high profile institutions like the Royal College of Art in London and high profile female artists like for example Anna Mary Howitt (1824-1884) or Marie Spartali (1843-1927). It is feasible that if enough local studies were undertaken some conclusion could be made about the true overall national situation. Liverpool was chosen as the provincial city on which to base my local case study. Although the Della Robbia Pottery was situated in Birkenhead information already available about the workforce indicated that for the majority, their families and homes were in Liverpool itself. The lives of the workforce as a whole were investigated in the research but the focus was on the lives of four artist/designers at the pottery; Marian de Caluwé, Cassandra Annie Walker, Ruth Bare and Charles Collis. The Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead founded by Harold Rathbone in 1894, as noted in the introduction, had a preponderance of female designers and paintresses who were the mainstay of the company. These women have been recognised by contemporary and current art critics as having produced some of the best works associated with the pottery. Moreover the works were of sufficiently high quality that they are still exhibited in some of this country's major museums. For example Glasgow City Art Gallery purchased fifteen pieces of Della Robbia in 1904 from the Green Park Exhibition of Pottery and Porcelain. Eight of these pieces bore the mark of Marian de Caluwé, three of which are still currently on display in the museum.⁵ This artist is pathetically anonymous, not having her dates of birth or death acknowledged by either museums or vendors of her works, a factor common to many of her co-workers at the pottery, indeed a factor common to many women working in the decorative arts of that period. If the opportunity for art education was as difficult as we are led to believe how did a small run family business on Merseyside manage to produce so many local talented women? This question can only be answered by research into the opportunities for art education in Liverpool.

History of Art Education

The early history of art education is well documented but a brief summary will help to put the events of the later nineteenth century in to context. Traditionally art education has been divided by the two disciplines of the fine arts and the decorative arts. Prior to the fifteenth century the majority of the art, craft and design activities fell within the remit of the guilds. These also included what to day we call the fine arts such as painting and sculpture. In the fifteenth century theorists began to draw a distinction between craft skills which mainly catered for functional needs and those that gave scope for imaginative self-expression and intellectual creativity. The first category included most of what to-day is designated as the decorative arts i.e. ceramics, jewelry, textiles and furniture, the second as the fine arts of painting and sculpture. The first organized schools of art (the academies, which first appeared around 1500) reinforced this division.

Over a period of time education in the decorative arts followed a different pattern to that of the fine arts. In England, as far as the decorative arts were concerned, there was little tradition of state patronage or promotion of design as there had been on the continent. Some industrialists like Josiah Wedgwood in the ceramics industry provided a basic measure of design and education for his workers. There were also many private schools for training artisans run by teachers and designers but on the whole they lacked permanence and quality. In the public domain some measure of adult education was offered by the Mechanics Institutes which had been founded in 1823 and were by 1835 established in the large cities throughout the country. They were poorly resourced and generally held in low esteem but they were the only public institution involved in the teaching of the decorative arts.

In 1837 as a result of the findings of the 1835 Government Select Committee (whose remit was to look at the question of art and design education), the London School of Design was set up, followed in subsequent years by its many provincial branches. Theoretically the opportunities to attend the Schools of Design were open to women from their inception but as already noted, it was a problematic area for the directors

of these institutions. The Schools of Design themselves were marked by repeated conflicts on aims and methods of teaching. In 1852 Henry Cole took control of these schools, financed from the profits of the 1851 Great Exhibition. However, the dominant ideology of the Department of Science and Art is thought to have thwarted any serious progress in the arts and crafts training during this period. The gradual appearance of a commitment to crafts within the schools of art and design owed its origins to forces outside the institutional structures. Without doubt the most important of these was the Arts and Craft Movement. This movement was predicated on absence of any distinction that had existed between the fine and the decorative arts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was at the root of the arguments proposed by Pugin in *True Principles of Christian Architecture*, by Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice*, and William Morris in *The Curse of Machinery*. The philosophy of the movement is too well known to need discussion here as also is that of the role played by William Morris and his followers. Two such followers were Walter Crane and William Lethaby and through their influential positions in the colleges of Art and Design, they were able to put in place the changes arising from their philosophical beliefs.⁶

The traditional route of training in the fine arts was different to that of the decorative arts depending on the artist's financial status. Normally it involved attendance at a private institution such as Heatherley's in London then progression to a more prestigious academy like the Royal Academy and finally study abroad in either Paris or in Antwerp. This was the accepted route for men but not necessarily the one for women. During the nineteenth century many art institutions were organised in terms of sexual difference. These well-documented differences included some aspects as basic as excluding women altogether from admittance or limiting their intake numbers. We are told that society and academic schools characterised women as special, separate and not infrequently as amateur. Timetables and charges, as such, were guaranteed to exclude most women. For example the Royal Academy Schools had free tuition but women were refused admission. It was not until 1860 that women were finally but reluctantly admitted to the Royal Academy following the well-known campaign spearheaded by Barbara Bodichon, Laura Herford, Henrietta

Ward and Fanny Corbaux, to try and change the rules. Even so they refused to let women attend life classes, crucial to an artist's training, with the obvious consequences. The life classes remained closed to the women until 1893 when the ruling was changed to allow them to study a partially draped model in a separate class. Other options, like attendance at private schools such as Heatherley's, charged fees, which were beyond the reach of many of the women.

There were some examples of more enlightened approaches to would-be female artists. The Slade School of Art, founded in 1871 as an independent Art School, was such an example. By the late nineteenth century women at the Slade studied with men at a primary level and most importantly had access to the study of life models.⁷ An article in the *Magazine of Art* described in detail the opportunities available to women at the Slade:

... for the first time in England, indeed in Europe, a public Fine Art School was thrown open to male and female students on the precisely the same terms, and giving both sexes fair and equal opportunities.⁸

The history of the Female School of Design founded in 1842 was an example however, of some of the difficulties encountered by women to educate themselves in the field of art. It flourished under the directorship of Fanny McIan, attracting women determined to succeed in their art. The jealousy aroused by the success of these women and the consequential political manoeuvres resulted in the school being relocated in 1848 to a notoriously insalubrious and unsafe area in the Strand. After a good deal of lobbying the school was relocated later that year to a more appropriate venue in Gower Street. The renamed Female School of Art flourished once more. It is important to point out that although many women were desirous of obtaining an education which would nourish and develop their talents in the fine arts because of the difficulties encountered in this area, education in the decorative arts was often the only avenue open to them. This served as a "back door" into their first choice.

Public institution regulations were not the only obstacles would be female artists had to contend with. The private institution of the family, in terms of financial and moral

control, was equally oppressive. The importance of the family as a social institution in shaping women's desires and aspirations was emphasized by Elizabeth Ellet in the earliest book on women artists in England, published in 1859.⁹ One of the most restrictive was that of middle class girls and women not being expected to work for a living - this was the prerogative of the male relatives. This sometimes resulted in the women having to go against parental or spouses' wishes. Women from the lower middle classes found themselves in an even more intolerable position. Economic pressures made it necessary for them to work but social convention dictated the narrow confines of the type of work considered suitable.

This brief historical but general survey of the major educational bodies in Victorian England would appear to give some validity to Linda Nochlin's argument that institutions determined women's abilities to become artists. History does tell us that the opportunities for women to train in the arts had improved considerably in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Women were no longer denied access to the Royal Academy Schools and the battles once fought by Fanny McIan on behalf of her students at the Female School of Design were long over. Accessibility to life classes were still a major stumbling block to female students. However entrance to the Royal Academy Schools or even the South Kensington School of Art was probably not an issue for the majority of women nor the men working at the Della Robbia Pottery or in the provinces. Moreover research showed that one of the women at the Della Robbia Pottery, Marian de Caluwé had been born in Liverpool in 1847, long before these changes had taken place.¹⁰

The Use of the Della Robbia Workforce as a Case Study.

The historical perspective of the status of female art education has been based on the lives and experiences of some of the very high profile and successful women artists. A survey of the educational histories of some of the principal artists at the Birkenhead Pottery should enable some conclusions to be drawn about the "norm" as opposed to the "exceptional." Harold Rathbone, the co-founder of the pottery, followed a very traditional pattern of art education for a male of his social class; namely Heatherley's

Art School, the Slade and subsequently Paris. Apart from the Rathbones being a wealthy family they were also well connected and therefore where to study posed no real problems for him.¹¹ The same was not true for example of Marian de Caluwé, one of four girls whose father worked as a civil servant in the Customs House at the Liverpool Docks or Charles Collis whose father was a labourer at the Birkenhead docks.¹² Despite the paucity of factual information on the pottery workers there are some indications of diversity of backgrounds. In the case of the female workforce this is contrary to the perception of the male workers at the Della Robbia of the women being wealthy young ladies from the Wirral whiling away their time.¹³ Social and economic status is of paramount importance in determining the type of education normally available to women. Consequently, establishing the social background of the Della Robbia women is important in any discussion on education opportunities. The choice of Marian de Caluwé, Cassandra Annie Walker, Ruth Bare and Charles Collis was not a random one.¹⁴ For any valid conclusions to be drawn on the quality of their art training both contemporary and current art critics and collectors needed to have judged all four to have shown exceptional talent and skill in their work. This proved to be the case; the latter assessment being based partly the prices the works now fetch at auction; the former based on contemporary reports in art magazines such as *The Studio* or *The Magazine of Art*.¹⁵

The four subjects seemingly all came from different backgrounds and consequently are suitable case studies to test out some of the canons of history in relation to women's professional development. One of these canons was that being related to a male artist facilitated the opportunity for good art training.¹⁶ These males could either tutor the women themselves or offer the use of studios. Another is that women needed to come from affluent families prepared to support them financially given the uncertainty and difficulty in marketing works of art. Alternatively they needed to be single with independent means in order to travel abroad to further their art training. Many of the well-known female Victorian artists fitted into these categories, like Barbara Bodichon (née Smith), Evelyn De Morgan (née Pickering), Maria Stillman

(née Spartali) and Kate Greenaway. Males allegedly were not subjected to the same restraints.

Cassandra Walker (1875-1936) was the daughter of an accountant who worked for the Cheshire Line Railway and had no known connections with the art world.¹⁷ She worked at the pottery for the whole time it remained open from 1894 –1906. She was unmarried at the closure of the pottery in 1906 but married in 1914.¹⁸ Ruth Bare (1880-1962) was the daughter of Harold Bloomfield Bare, a well-known Liverpool architect and regular contributor to *The Studio* magazine.¹⁹ She therefore did have family connections with the art world. Pottery marks attributed to her date from 1898-1904 but she started at the pottery in approximately 1894 soon after her fourteenth birthday.²⁰ In 1907 she married Otto Baier a German medical student and member of the Positivist Church. They subsequently had four children. Mention has already been made of Marian de Caluwé's (1847-1925) early details. At the start of the research it was thought she had no known connections with the art world but subsequent investigation revealed that she did have through the Falmouth branch of the family. In 1876 she married Emile de Caluwé whose occupation at the time of his marriage is listed as importer of marble. (By the time he amalgamated his company with that of Harold Rathbone's in 1900 his occupation is given as that of a sculptor.)²¹ He subsequently went on to set up his own business as a monumental stone mason and supplier of church decorations.²² The de Caluwés were thought to have had one son, Sebastian, born in 1876, fourteen years before Marian joined the pottery, but in fact they had four children, Sebastian being the youngest.²³ Marian started work at the pottery in 1900 when her husband's company amalgamated with the Della Robbia and remained there until its closure in 1906. Charles Collis (1879-1967) is one of the few artists at the Della Robbia Pottery who ever committed to paper some of his experiences of working at the pottery. This included a few brief biographical details.²⁴ There was no indication from his notes that his family had any connections with the art world. All four subjects while working at the Birkenhead Pottery were employed in the capacity of principal designers as well as artistic

painters. Normally in the ceramics industry, the role of principal designer was the prerogative of male artists.²⁵

The City of Liverpool and Its Relationship with Art.

The Liverpool in which the workers at the Della Robbia Pottery grew up was a city of contrasts from stark poverty to extreme wealth. In 1840 one eighth of Liverpool's population lived in cellars dug in soil saturated in chemicals or sewage.²⁶ By the end of the century it still had the largest workhouse in Europe at the same time as having more millionaires than the rival city Manchester. The economic dimensions of this wealth were to have significant influence on art in the city. Unlike many other growing northern towns of this period, Liverpool's wealth was not based on industry but on international commerce. The traditional industries of the eighteenth century such as watch making and ceramics had disappeared. Unlike Nottingham and its lace industry, Birmingham and the metals industries and Manchester and its textiles, the demand for good designers to support Liverpool industries was not a necessity. This was acknowledged as early as 1855 in the *First Annual Report of the Government School of Art* and as late as 1894 in a report of the Liverpool Technical Instruction Committee.²⁷ The powerful and wealthy citizens of Liverpool viewed art as something that would enrich the daily lives of its population and add to its social stability. It was therefore to be encouraged for its own sake.

These powerful men who influenced art in the city provided the works of art themselves, the buildings in which to view the art and the means of educating the populace to produce art. It was the Liverpool MP William Ewart who chaired the 1835 Government Enquiry into the setting up of the Schools of Design. In 1857 William Brown a wealthy local businessman and MP for South Lancashire, donated the money for the Liverpool Museum. Joseph Mayer, goldsmith and antiquarian, gave some fifteen thousand items of his personal collection to the same museum. The shipping magnate George Holt and the Rathbone merchant banking family made significant philanthropic contributions to providing art and education for local people. Philip Rathbone's contribution in particular must be acknowledged in relation to the Walker Art Gallery's outstanding collections. The Walker Art Gallery itself was the

result of the generous financing of the wealthy brewery magnate Sir Andrew Barclay Walker.

William Roscoe however is probably considered the founding father of the promotion of art in the city of Liverpool.²⁸ Inspired by a love of beauty he wanted Liverpool to become the Florence of England, in spirit at least if not in form. His founding of the Liverpool Institute in 1814 and the associated Liverpool Academy had far reaching consequences as far as art was concerned. At one end of the spectrum the Academy awarded a £50 prize to Holman Hunt in 1851 for his painting *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia*, the start of Liverpool's long association with the works of the Pre-Raphaelites. At the other end of the spectrum Roscoe was indirectly responsible through the Liverpool Institute for the schools which provided art education in the city throughout most of the nineteenth century. (The organization and the responsibilities of the Liverpool Institute were complex: see appendix 1). From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards Liverpool was considered to have had some of the finest art collections outside London.

History of the Development of Art Education in Liverpool

In 1824 influenced by Birkbeck's efforts in London, a group of enthusiasts in Liverpool set up an Apprentices and Mechanics Library. This was in an attempt to make moves towards a more widely based form of adult education. The library was officially adopted by the town council in 1824 and by 1825 it had rapidly progressed into the Liverpool Mechanics School of Art. In 1832 it was reorganised again to become the Liverpool Mechanics Institution. Its original motto was *Knowledge is Power* a theoretically uneasy motto for some sections of the public to tolerate but never the less the institution thrived. Many of the notable citizens of Liverpool, including William Rathbone, Harold's uncle gave it their backing.

Mechanics Institutions traditionally had, and historically still have, a reputation for providing stereotyped and regimented art training for the artisan classes. In the early days the Liverpool School offered only evening classes held in the disused German Chapel in St. Thomas Street and subsequently in Slater Street. The syllabus offered

classes in science, maths drawing and geography. Opportunities provided by the founders were at first intended to be of a practical use rather than artistic, for example, for young men going into the ship building trade. By 1837 the syllabus included more art subjects and new premises were opened in Mount Street on land donated by the city council. Statistics for admissions in 1840 show that 176 students enrolled. Out of this 60 were enrolled for modelling and painting classes. Twenty-six men were over 20 years old, sixty-nine were over 16 years old and fourteen were under 16 years old. They came from a variety of professions, which included architects, artists, engravers, carvers, gilders, painters, cabinetmakers, upholsterer, joiners and stonemasons.²⁹

During the next decade the numbers declined steadily and in 1850 on the recommendations of the inspectors from the Government School of Design, a more progressive scheme of art teaching was introduced. In 1854 the then Liverpool School of Design was recognised by the government department at South Kensington and renamed the South Liverpool School of Art under the directorship of John Finnie. He remained in charge for the next 40 years. Nationally these forty years coincided with the most turbulent period in the history of art education.³⁰ The lack of interest and documentation by historians on Liverpool art educational institutions (other than on the “Art Sheds”) may imply that nothing of significance could have happened or it would have been documented. The only work of note on the city’s School of Art is the unpublished M. Phil. thesis by Colin Morris.³¹ This work covers a very wide time scale but in essence is a detailed factual account of the history of the School of Art. The one line in Quentin Bell’s book on Liverpool gives the impression that it followed the pattern of most of the art schools run under the jurisdiction of the Department of Science and Education at South Kensington.³² There is only one reference I have come across on the Liverpool School of Art which implies that the quality of teaching was above normal and that is by Edward Morris in a paper on contemporary art in nineteenth century Liverpool and Manchester in which he says:

It is true that the Liverpool School of Art – as it developed into a *significant* regional art college at the end of the nineteenth century – had its origins not in the Liverpool Academy’s Art School but in the drawing classes of the

Liverpool Mechanics' School of Arts.....and probably only achieved reasonable standards in fine art with the appointment of John Finnie as headmaster in 1853.³³

Morris's comments only imply that it did not become anything other than mediocre until the end of the century. It was in trying to trace the education backgrounds of the artists at the Della Robbia Pottery that it became apparent that Liverpool did not conform to the norm. Unusually, Liverpool's history of art education for women starts not at the secondary level of South Kensington but at the primary school level with the opening of Blackburne House Girls School.

Blackburne House Girls School.

A survey of Education in Liverpool in 1835 by The Manchester Statistical Society had disclosed that out of a school age population of approximately 50,000 children only half received any education at all. Most of this was of a very poor standard and in particular that provided for females. The Trustees of the Liverpool Institute recognised there was a need to educate women and in the early 1840's the directors of a section of the Liverpool Institute, turned their thoughts to the setting up of a girl's school. They had set up a boy's school some years previously and it was hoped to repeat the successful venture for girls. The move had the support of local influential people like the Earl of Sefton and national figures like Charles Dickens. Between 1843 and 1844 discussions went on as to the way the school should be run. Most significantly it was concluded that this should be on the same lines as the boy's school. At a special general meeting of members and friends of the Institute, convened in 1844, the MP Thomas Wyse gave an address stressing the importance of educating women, saying "The middle classes of all others has the worst provision for the education of its daughters."³⁴

Sufficient importance had been attached to providing female education that by August 1844 the school had opened in premises (Blackburne House) offered at a moderate rent to the directors by George Holt.³⁵ Frances Davies was appointed as the first headmistress and 45 children registered for the infant school and 260 children for the adult school. Fees were set at £5 per annum for the daughters of the members

of the Institute and £5-10s for others. The syllabus was to aim at solid acquirements rather than showy accomplishments.³⁶ At a time of religious fervour in Victorian England, no definite theological teaching would be attempted. Among the subjects to be taught were drawing, chemistry, natural philosophy and callisthenics.³⁷ The pioneering approach of the school gave the first pupils the opportunities to be taught some of the same academic subjects as taught at the neighbouring boy's school. Numbers soon grew and had to be limited to 300. This meant that there was usually a waiting list indicative of the desire of Liverpudlians to see their daughters receive a good education.

The Institute's commitment to women was not just confined to primary education. In 1846 they set up facilities within the school for women to train as teachers. By 1856 this section was so successful that they established a separate Ladies Teacher Training College as part of the school.³⁸ In 1880 they introduced evening classes in English and French for women. Blackburne House itself was a handsome Georgian building dating from 1788 (see illustration 2 of the building in 1874). It was situated in Hope Street across the road from the future new Liverpool School of Art and adjacent to Mount Street where the then Liverpool Art School was based in the Mechanics Institute (see map of central Liverpool appendix 2).

The proximity of the Blackburne House to the Art School was a great advantage for the girls at the school with talent and interest in art since both came under the jurisdiction of the Liverpool Institute and its Directors. In particular the Art School was influential in how drawing was taught in the school since it was felt to be appropriate that the supervision of this subject should come under the management of the Head of the School of Art. In 1855 the head of the school (by now known as the School of Design, having come into the South Kensington scheme in 1853) was John Finnie. Finnie who had been born in Aberdeen, educated at the Newcastle School of Design under William Bell Scott and subsequently at South Kensington, was considered a very fine artist.³⁹

In the early days John Finnie taught the girls himself and it is also clear that the

lessons took place in the Art School and not in Blackburne House.⁴⁰ The location of the two institutions not only facilitated the lessons but it also meant that the girls had easy access to the Sculpture Gallery situated in the Art School. Access to Sculpture was considered a basic essential by art educationalists. The directors of the Liverpool Institute were proud of their prestigious gallery which was mentioned in their 1860 Prospectus as being part of the Art School premises and:

Which contains the most numerous public collections of specimens of Ancient and Modern Art to be found anywhere within the country, except in the galleries of London or Edinburgh, forming the best set of studies at the command of any educational establishment in the Kingdom.⁴¹

In 1886 the Girl's School Committee had recommended sending Blackburne house pupils who were sufficiently advanced, to the School of Art for instruction in second grade drawing. The School Committee agreed to pay £60 per annum to the Art School and a student art teacher under John Finnie's supervision would teach the pupils.⁴² From an early age the girls therefore had access to some of the fundamental requirements for a successful art education. The famous three-part article written in 1872 *Art-Work for Women* gave a list of reasons why women had not succeeded in obtaining art-work. One of these was the lack of good training, particularly in early school life where teachers themselves were lacking in appropriate skills.⁴³ This could not be said of the teaching, staff or syllabus at Blackburne House. In 1880 one of the pupils, Margaret Seward, won the distinction of being placed first amongst all the girls in England in the Oxford senior local examinations. As far as art education was concerned there is ample evidence to show this was taken seriously by the school. As early as 1861 the head teacher wrote to John Ruskin to seek his advice on the best approach to teaching drawing.⁴⁴

There is evidence that the relationship between the Girl's School and the Art School lasted right up to the early twentieth century. At a managers meeting of the Art School in 1905 the importance of continuing to supervise the drawing lessons at Blackburne House was emphasised. In the minutes it was stated, "The Principal of the City Art School should continue to direct and supervise the drawing instruction at

Blackburne House.”⁴⁵ Not only did the girls attend these art classes but they were also routinely entered for the National Examinations run by the South Kensington School of Art. Published results show that they often did far better than some of the other Liverpool entrants.⁴⁶ Attendance therefore at Blackburne House guaranteed a very good basic grounding and preparation for girls who wanted to continue with further studies in art fulfilling the conditions recommended by the *Art Journal*.

Blackburne House and the Della Robbia Pottery

Some of the school registers for Blackburne House are still extant. A search of these records for the years 1858-1864 revealed that Katherine Marian Genn (Marian de Caluwé) was a pupil at the school during this period. Her sisters Caroline, Ellen and Margaret also appear in the Registers.⁴⁷ Although the Genn family moved house many times during Marian’s school years they never lived more than a few streets from this new school.⁴⁸ It was at this point that further biographical research was undertaken on the Genn family. An important point that did emerge was a previously unknown family leaning towards art. The Genns had originated from Falmouth and a large part of the family continued to live there, in particular Marian’s aunt Ellen and her cousins Julia and Ellen Hawke Genn. Research revealed that Aunt Ellen had been an artist of some standing in Cornwall.⁴⁹ Her cousins also were artists and had their own studio in Falmouth. In addition the Genn family were good friends of the Fox family (who were pioneers in women’s education) living a few doors away from each other. Furthermore the diaries of Henry Tuke, the artist and examiner at the South Kensington School of Art, reveal that he was a close friend of the Genn family.⁵⁰ This research demonstrated that the statement made earlier in this chapter that Marian de Caluwé had no apparent links with the art world was very much the reverse since the Falmouth and Liverpool branches of the family were in close contact with each other over the years. It is also clear that through attendance at Blackburne House Marian had benefited from a good preparation for art education during her school years.

Marian however was one of the older female artists at the Della Robbia Pottery.

Through further research it was possible to discover the exact ages of some of the other women artists in particular that of Cassandra Walker (Ruth Bare's was already known). During her school years, Cassandra's family lived in various locations in Liverpool such as Little Woolton and Halewood Road.⁵¹ Her elder brother William attended the Liverpool Collegiate School, which also had an equivalent girl's school.⁵² Many of the other female employees at the pottery were in the same age group as Ruth and Cassandra, like Gwendoline Buckler and Annie Smith. Unfortunately the Blackburne House School Registers for the appropriate years for these artists are missing and it was not possible to establish whether they and any other female workers other than Marian de Caluwé were also at the school. Ruth Bare would not have attended the school since she and her family moved to Philadelphia when she was eight years old, returning just before her fourteenth birthday. We know from his own notes that Charles Collis attended the local Saint Anne's School in Birkenhead.⁵³ If they and others did not have the advantages that Blackburne House offered at this early stage of their lives then certainly Liverpool did have good opportunities for the next stage of art training. This was again due to the involvement of the Liverpool Institute whose Directors also had responsibility for the Liverpool School of Art.⁵⁴

Liverpool School of Art in the Context of the Other Schools of Art

Like many provincial art schools the Liverpool School of Art came under the jurisdiction of South Kensington in so far as the syllabus, examinations and appointment of staff were concerned. The directors of the Liverpool Institute nevertheless still retained overall jurisdiction of the School of Art. The restructuring advised by the government inspector from South Kensington in 1853 resulted in what appeared to have been a more restricted syllabus. However over the years classes grew in size, as did the number of subjects taught and so did the demand for space. In 1881 due to overcrowding a decision had been made to construct a new building for the art department in Hope Street which was adjacent to Mount Street. This opened in 1883 with 393 students enrolled, having cost £12,000 (see illustration 4). Many provincial art schools struggled financially during this period but Liverpool appeared

to be less affected than most.⁵⁵ One of the members of the Board of Directors had provided the money almost in its entirety for this new building and Liverpool Corporation had donated the land. This did not mean that the Art School was without financial problems but unlike many other places the wealthy Liverpool citizens were usually prepared to give whatever support was needed. This support was not based on what commercial advantages it had for the donors (as we already know Liverpool had no industries which relied on art and design) but from the aesthetic advantages that art and good design offered to the public. This aspect was reinforced by the directors of the Liverpool Institute in the Annual Report of 1885:

Although no manufacture is carried on in Liverpool which makes a special demand for knowledge of design such as is needful in Manchester, Birmingham and Nottingham and other centres of industry, yet the Directors are hopeful that some day the demand may arise.⁵⁶

The history of the Liverpool School of Art is a paradigm for the use of a local study when trying to assess the validity of an established view of the *status quo*. In-depth examination of both the Directors of the Liverpool Institute and Art School minutes reveal how the Art School did not always conform to the norm or reflect the mediocrity attributed to it. Throughout its history it seemed to have been free from many of the internal squabbles, which were endemic in some of the other schools of design, as for example in the case of the Birmingham School of Art.⁵⁷ It also seemed to have a degree of independence from South Kensington although student's work submitted never seems generally to feature very highly in the examination results. John Sparkes's *History of the Schools of Art* published in 1884, lists the schools from which the National Art Scholars came from for the years 1863-1884. Out of the list of 37 schools Liverpool was near the bottom having had only one scholar. South Kensington had 25, Birmingham 18 and Stoke-on-Trent 12.⁵⁸ There were many other statistics that did not seem to reflect Liverpool's true performance as mirrored in the careers of many of its students. Records show that the successes were many. As early as 1858 Gertrude and Edith Martineau (1842-1909) were attending the art classes and also winning medals for their work.⁵⁹ In the 1880's student lists contain the names of some of women artists like Constance Copeman (1864-1953) and Mary

McCrossan (1864-1934) whose work is currently on display at the Walker Art Gallery.⁶⁰ In the 1890's names appear such as May Louise Cooksey (1878-1943) who went on to have a very successful career as an ecclesiastical artist and lecturer at South Kensington School of Art. William Martin and Katie Fisher both won Gold Medals in the 1897 National Competitions and subsequently earned their living through their art skills.⁶¹ Detailed researches of registers and exhibition lists will emphasise both the numbers of male and female students who went on to learn their living both in the fine and decorative arts. The whole question of success as defined by the numbers of students who trained in the art Schools and subsequently had careers in art was contentious even in the years 1902-1910. Figures issued in a report on the Royal College of Art for the years 1900-1910 and refuted by Frank Brown, purported that only 32 out of 459 art students were subsequently employed in the practice of art as opposed to teachers in art.⁶² A comparison of modern art school lists would undoubtedly show that modern schools have no more "success" than their Victorian counterparts if success is measured in notoriety or high profile employment.

Confrontation with South Kensington

It was obvious that John Finnie was also of the same opinion about the results from the South Kensington Examiners. Finnie conveyed his concerns to the Directors at an Art School committee meeting in 1867. He reported that "the mode of conducting, and the result of the examinations in elementary drawing were unsatisfactory and that the talent of the school was not properly rewarded."⁶³ This perception of South Kensington's inability to recognise talent was an ongoing contention for the Head of the Liverpool School of Art. Ten years later he again reported to the committee members that he thought the students in the advanced drawing classes had been wrongly assessed by the South Kensington Examiners, the inferior being upgraded and the talented down graded. The secretary was asked to write to the Department of Science and Art and request the return of the work so that the committee could judge for themselves. The request was not complied with.⁶⁴ Later statistics and returns on exam results for the National Competitions at South Kensington show very little improvement as far as Liverpool is concerned. In fact the South Kensington

Inspectors Reports for 1873 and 1874 were damning saying “that Liverpool does not hold its own with towns like Birmingham let alone with smaller places like Lincoln and Gloucester.”⁶⁵ By 1900 there appears to have been a change in the Liverpool examination results with more of the prestigious Gold Medals being awarded to its students. Between 1899 and 1913, gold medals were awarded every year apart from 1905 and 1906.⁶⁶ In 1900 Liverpool was awarded one of the five Gold Medals at the Paris Exhibition for the quality of its Art School teaching.⁶⁷ John Finnie had retired in 1897 but the gap between his retirement and the Paris Exhibition was too short to explain a dramatic turnabout in the perception of the School. The more likely explanation is that the quality of art training at the Liverpool School of Art had been of a very high quality from the start and throughout John Finnie’s long headship. Put into the context of the South Kensington’s reputation for stifling talent, Liverpool’s battles with the organisation could be interpreted as Liverpool recognising and encouraging talent. Their lack of success in examination results could also have indicated the presence of quality students who failed to conform to the stereotyped expected by South Kensington. The improved results also coincided with the change in philosophy of art education in the Government Schools of Art with the appointment of many of the leading Arts and Crafts practitioners to influential posts in the schools. The changed ethos could have altered the way in which students work was marked to the benefit of Liverpool. A paper read at the International Art Conference in Venice circa 1905, written by Francis Ford, Secretary of the Society of Art Masters, certainly adds weight to this argument. He wrote:

I would mention one other need which has been greatly felt in England – need of the prohibition of the inspection of Art Teaching by persons who are not specially qualified for the work. It needs no argument to show that gentlemen occupying the position of Government Inspectors should not be permitted to inspect or report on work with which they have no practical acquaintance. But in England, in the past, this evil has been the source of constant irritation and heartburning, and although Schools of Art are now under the inspection of properly qualified Inspectors, the same cannot be said of other institutions.⁶⁸

Women and the Liverpool School of Art

So far in this chapter the discussion on the Liverpool School of Art has focused on

the quality of the teaching and John Finnie's confrontations with South Kensington. It was not only on South Kensington's ability to assess art that Finnie had periodic confrontations but on practical issues as well. One issue in particular had a bearing on opportunities for women. Finnie's daytime class for ladies was large and successful with an average attendance of 90 students. Many of these students, as a result of the South Kensington examiner's inflexibility in the timing of the examination of their work, were excluded from progressing to higher exams.⁶⁹ The examiner attended only in the evenings thus excluding many ladies who for family or social reasons it was inappropriate to be out so late. They therefore could not be examined on their work.

A thorough search for Marian Genn's name in the examination results found no mention of her. It was reasonable to assume that, having attended Blackburne House and the family home always being in close proximity to both institutions, she might have attended the Liverpool School of Art. Her non-appearance in the examination lists could have been explained by the exclusion of so many women from the daytime classes taking part in the examinations themselves. Finding later evidence that she had indeed been a student at the Liverpool School of Art backed up this theory. In 1872 she was awarded the prize for the best painting from life, a prize awarded normally on John Finnie's recommendation.⁷⁰

Obviously John Finnie's long headship of the school, which lasted for 42 years, brought a degree of stability to the establishment but it is important to note he had a positive approach to the female students. Inevitably there was a strong element of encouraging women into the classes because of the revenue they brought in but he also recognised their talent and potential as artists. The ethos of the school was such that it did try to offer women opportunities in art education but the School did have to work within the Victorian social codes of the day. Despite these tight codes, classes were open to women even in the early days. Initially these were in the daytime, including the painting class in landscape taught by Finnie himself, but in 1860 a class was introduced from 5pm-6.30pm. By 1875 there were 90 ladies on the School role and in 1883 when the art School moved to larger premises in Hope

Street, the Directors opened up all their evening classes to women. One of Finnie's daytime classes for ladies was designated as a private class in order to avoid the tedious South Kensington regulations.⁷¹

Draped or Nude? Life Classes for Women at the Liverpool School of Art

Availability of life classes to women has traditionally been the mark of success of an art institution but the definition of life classes is not always explicit in primary sources. Colin Morris in his M. Phil. thesis on the Liverpool Regional College of Art indicates there is some uncertainty about the dates that these actually started in Liverpool.⁷² It is possible that the confusion about dates arises out of the lack of clarity of the precise meaning of *life classes*. It is clear from the Art School Minutes that there was a ladies *life class* in 1882 but this was probably not a nude class.⁷³ Some five years later, in December 1887, a report by John Finnie to the Art School Committee explained "that in consequence of advanced students leaving the school to proceed to London and Paris for such instruction as painting in the *life* as was not to be had in the day classes in the school, it was desirable to establish a *nude* life class in addition to the draped life class now held in the daytime." The Committee agreed to his request class.⁷⁴ In March 1888 the ladies at the Art School petitioned for their "own special life class" (nude class?) in order to allow them to practise for the examination on drawing from life. The ladies offered to pay for the cost of the model themselves. The request from the Liverpool female students for their life class was referred for sanctioning. In between it must have been suggested that the headmaster visit the Slade School of Art in order to observe the teaching.⁷⁵ The only reason to visit the Slade would have been to observe the nude classes, which had been available to female students for many years. Subsequent minutes do not record the outcome of either the request or the visit. These various references in the Art School Minutes to life classes are confusing in that they do not always clarify whether requests for life classes were for male, female or mixed classes or in some cases whether life classes were for nude or draped models. However in January 1891 an anonymous communication was forwarded to the Institute Committee members complaining about the want of an evening *life class* for ladies in the school. By April 1891 the minutes reveal that it had been necessary to open a *life class* for ladies in the evening

presumably in response to the anonymous communication in January.⁷⁶ These *life classes* must have been classes using a draped model because in December 1896 another request was received from two female students, Bertha Gorst and Gwendoline Buckler concerning the provision of an evening female *life class*.⁷⁷ The Committees minutes for the intervening years between these first requests and the later make no mention of the closure of the life class set up in 1891. The 1896 request therefore must have been a request for a different kind of life class. In January 1897 the Committee agreed that an advanced ladies life class should be started in the evenings. Minutes for July 1897 state that the ladies *nude* life class had proved to be a decided success, the number of students being over 20. We can therefore conclude that by 1897 nude classes were a definite reality for the Liverpool female art students. We can also conclude that the word *life class* can have more than one meaning. (See illustration 5 for an example of an art class).

Liverpool School of Art and the Della Robbia Pottery

References to some of the women artists and to a lesser degree to the male artists who worked at the Della Robbia Pottery in current pamphlets, papers and catalogues give no indication or prominence to the fact that they attended the Liverpool School of Art. This in contrast to listing those who attended the high profile *Art Sheds*.⁷⁸ The possible explanation could be that the Government Schools of Art were associated with the rougher artisan classes and women from the pottery would have been uncomfortable in that milieu, particularly after the University Department of Architecture and Applied Art (The Art Sheds) came into existence in the 1890's. This issue concerning the types of students who attended which establishments of art emerges again later in the chapter in the context of the University School of Art. Another simple explanation is lack of biographical information. Research shows that there were others apart from Marian de Caluwé who had studied at the Art School and also worked at the pottery. Gwendoline Buckler, daughter of the Vicar of Bidston was certainly a student at the Liverpool School as evidenced from the letter she wrote to the Art School Committee in 1896.⁷⁹ In the *Interim Report of the Della Robbia Pottery* Violet Enid Woodhouse is listed as one of the female artists but there

does seem to be some confusion about her name. The Catalogue of the 1981 Della Robbia Pottery Exhibition lists a Violet and an Enid Woodhouse, as do the registers of Art School students for 1906. (Violet Woodhouse is listed as Violet B. Woodhouse in the Royal Cambrian Academy Records). Violet was awarded one of the free scholarships to the School of Art in 1900 but had been described as “an untutored genius” by a contemporary magazine.⁸⁰ One of the male artists at the pottery, Tom Hall, was known to have won a scholarship from a local elementary school to the Liverpool School of Art but left when he was seventeen years old. Most notable of all the pottery workers (who was also described as “high and mighty” by her colleagues) to attend the School of Art was Cassandra Walker but this was only after the closure of the University Art School in 1905. Her sister Marion did attend the Government School of Art however and proved to be a very successful student there. Overall the history of events at the Liverpool School of Art show that by no means could it be considered to have been a meek conforming satellite of South Kensington. In addition under John Finnie it offered and demonstrated a positive approach to women artists which was in no way tokenism or patriarchal.

The School of Architecture and Applied Arts (The Art Sheds).

The second academic institution in Liverpool pertinent to its art education was the University College's School of Architecture and Applied Art. Its existence owed much to the Rathbone family. In the 1870's Liverpool had no university. Facilities were available for some subjects to be taught such as medicine but students had to sit exams through London University. There had been talk of trying to create a unified establishment and in 1880 when William Rathbone 6th (Harold's uncle) lost his parliamentary seat, he turned his attentions to raising the money to create the University College of Liverpool. He used all his business acumen and contacts to achieve this and at the end of the year he had raised £80,000. Land and buildings from the old lunatic asylum on Brownlow Hill, donated by the Corporation, were adapted and University College came into existence. This college along with the colleges in Manchester and Leeds formed the Victoria University and within this new College the Roscoe Chair of Fine Art was established.⁸¹

The Fine Art Department did not appear to fulfil all the needs required of it and plans for a School of Architecture within the new establishment were discussed at the University College Senate in 1893, the proposal being initiated by the Liverpool Architectural Society.⁸² The following month the Art and Education Sub-committee of the City Council also put forward a proposal for a School of Architecture to be based at the Walker Art Gallery and that the Liverpool School of Art be amalgamated with the new Architecture department. The Corporation's proposal came to nothing and the School of Art retained its independence. Instead the University Senate's suggestions were accepted. So in 1894 with the help of Philip Rathbone (who had strong views on the importance of the applied arts) and George Holt the shipping merchant, the Chair of Fine Arts was altered to the more practical Chair of Architecture and Applied Art. It is worth noting that this change also coincided with the peak of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Perhaps more interestingly the seeds for establishing an Art School in Liverpool run by practitioners, had been sown by Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo who in 1884 had been invited by the Liverpool University Senate to deliver a course of Art Lectures.⁸³ Despite the fact the remuneration was £8 per lecture (the same lecture to be repeated in the evening) Mackmurdo turned down the offer giving his reasons in a letter to the Senate. Predominantly these were that lectures in their own right were insufficient for art training without the help of lecturers offering "personal and practical assistance."⁸⁴ So in August 1894 Fred Simpson was appointed as the first Professor of the new School of Architecture and Director of the Department of Applied Art. This Department of Applied Art was fondly known as the Art Sheds, taking its name from the temporary corrugated iron sheds in which it was housed. Charles Herbert Reilly who was Professor of Architecture and nominal director of the Art Sheds in 1904 until its closure in 1905, wrote in his autobiography what he perceived to be the philosophy of creating a department of Applied Art within the architectural setting.

It will be remembered that there were certain iron corrugated sheds in the University quadrangle.....the reason for their existence is interesting. They were there because of the Arts and Craft Movement of the 90's.....Mackay and his friends, with a very different view of what contributed the essentials of architecture to that held to-day.....thought that it was no good the university teaching the design of buildings without at the same time teaching

"the crafts".....They did not mean plaster, bricklaying and masonry....To have done so would have merely been to have reproduced less efficiently the work of the town's Central Technical School, recently rebuilt and equipped by the latter on a large scale. By crafts they meant the decorative crafts, wrought iron work, hammered silver and enamelling. They felt in short the need of adding artiness to architecture.⁸⁵

In time the number of Art students far outweighed those of the Architectural ones and there was some conjecture why this should have happened. If one looks at the national scene it becomes clear that Liverpool was in various forms offering a wide range of training facilities to a wide range of students from an equally wide range of socio-economic class. Fees were set at a reasonable rate, an average of 5/- per class per term. The hours of tuition were such that those who needed to work for economic reasons also had access to good tuition and this applied equally to the male and female population. The most significant factor is probably that the lecturers were practising and leading exponents of their particular forms of art (as had been recommended by Mackmurdo 10 years earlier) and all went on to achieve further national prominence. They also had innovative and flexible approaches to their students.

The first member of staff to be appointed was Robert Anning Bell, an extremely popular figure with an already established reputation. Modelling, woodcarving and sculpture came under the direction of Charles Allen. In 1897 Richard Rathbone was engaged to teach the new craft of copper beating. The first female member of staff, Lily Day was appointed to teach enamelling.⁸⁶ When Anning Bell left in 1898, his replacement was Herbert MacNair who brought with him all the ideas of the "Glasgow Four."⁸⁷ MacNair's influence in the Art School deserves more recognition than he receives, there being a tendency for his contributions to be overshadowed by his brother-in-law Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Roger Billcliffe in his article on *MacNair in Glasgow and Liverpool* has begun to readdress this imbalance.⁸⁸ In 1901 Herbert Jackson, a popular member of the staff went on temporary leave to serve in the second Boer War and the young Augustus John, a recent Slade student, was appointed to fill the post. Therefore from 1894 onwards an alternative to the South Kensington style of teaching was available to Liverpool art students at the University

School. This same school also providing a hint of the ambience of the much admired French Schools.

According to Charles Reilly, when Augustus John joined the staff at the Art Sheds in 1901 the students at the Liverpool School of Art in Mount Street deserted in their droves to take advantage of John's teaching:

The chief thing which was really happening in the University Art Sheds and had been during the last two years, was something very different. Although there were always ladies from Sefton Park making pretty things, the presence of Augustus John teaching drawing painting was the great event, and that was what was emptying the rival school and filling the University one with all the serious artists in the town.....for there is no doubt that the one great and undoubted genius with whom the University of Liverpool has been associated with, in its short career is Augustus John.⁸⁹

Neither the enrolment registers at Mount Street nor the Art Sheds bear this out. John remained only nine months in his teaching post and it is clear from John's own accounts of his time in Liverpool that he found teaching a chore and it came second to enjoying a good social life. In a letter to William Rothenstein in spring 1902 he wrote:

I am now expected to examine all the work done by every student (50 or 60) during the past session and choose an example of each to send to the National Competition at South Kensington You can imagine the brilliant results of such rummage.⁹⁰

John could not make up his mind whether to resign his post or get himself thrown out. He left Liverpool in July 1902 after failing to stand up to toast the King at an important University dinner.⁹¹ As Professor of Architecture, Charles Reilly's academic status and personal views, particularly in relation to Augustus John's presence in the school, have been responsible for some of the subsequent perceptions of the quality of the two schools of art; Mount Street being perceived as attracting less talented students. Charles Reilly was an architect of the new school and the views he expressed did not give justice to Liverpool's long history of commitment to the decorative arts. The city hosted the prestigious first Congress of Art in 1888

aimed at fostering the applied arts. Under Philip Rathbone's guidance the city also initiated the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibitions which were open to exhibitors of both branches of the arts. Throughout his autobiography Reilly demonstrates élitism towards the fine arts and a derogatory approach to the applied arts. An example of Reilly's continual and prolonged influence on the way Mount Street is regarded, is demonstrated in an article written as late as 1970 by Roger Billcliffe who said:

The students, especially those not studying architecture, seem to have been quite intelligent and more adventurous than their counterparts in Mount Street.⁹²

An examination of the awards and in particular travelling scholarships given by Liverpool Corporation, which were open to students from both Art Schools, show neither establishment was superior to the other. Students from both art schools were equally likely to win the prestigious scholarships. The members of the Technical Sub-Committee awarded these scholarships on the independent recommendation of Edward Taylor, Head of the Birmingham School of Art.⁹³ If one examines the names of some of the holders of these scholarships it is clear that there was no bias towards either school of art or indeed against women receiving the awards. Four such winners were Phoebe McCleish in 1904 as a student at the Art Sheds, May Louise Cooksey in 1901-2, as a student at Mount Street, Marion Walker in 1894 as a student at Mount Street and Mary Cox Palethorpe in 1888 and 1890 as a student at Mount Street. Phoebe McCleish (1878/79 –1955) went on to make a career as a sculptor and ceramist. She married Harold Stabler and in 1921 they joined the Poole Pottery. Phoebe had some prestigious commissions, one of which was the *Rugby School War Memorial*, incidentally, made in the style of Della Robbia Architectural faience ware. May Louise Cooksey (1878-1943) went on to teach at the South Kensington School of Art being an ecclesiastical artist, landscape and figure painter and etcher. My research showed that Marion Walker (1873/4—1914) was in fact the sister of Cassandra Walker and after spending some time teaching art in Liverpool schools, went to Paris to work and study as an artist (see illustration 7).⁹⁴ According to her great niece Doreen Walker, Marion died in Paris in 1914.⁹⁵ Constance Copeman

(1864-1953) was a favourite pupil of John Finnie's and her work can be seen currently in the Walker Art Gallery. Examination of registers of other students from both schools also show that each school produced talented students who went on to become established and well known artists.

When the Art Sheds were eventually amalgamated with the Liverpool School of Art in 1905, (the latter retaining both its premises and staff,) it was reported at a manager's meeting on the 24th November 1905 that 383 students had registered that term.⁹⁶ Of these 201 were Mount Street students, 61 were from the School of Applied Art and 121 were new students. By the next meeting on 18th December the number of students transferring from the School of Applied Art had gone up to 70. This is despite the fact that the students did have the opportunity to continue their studies at a new art school (The Sandon School of Art of which more will be said later in the chapter) which was staffed by some of the former teachers of the Art Sheds. Moreover examination of archival documentation of the new Mount Street School show that many of the students who did transfer went on to make a living from their art.

The perception of the quality of the two art schools as defined by Charles Reilly is therefore flawed on two accounts. The figures reported of registrations for students for both schools of art do not indicate that either was rising or falling dramatically during the time Augustus John was in Liverpool. Secondly various comments by Reilly in his book indicate that he did not view the applied arts as something to be taken seriously and consequently he was not qualified to judge the quality of the students. Reilly was a great admirer of John's Bohemian lifestyle and this seems to have clouded his judgement. His view of and his relationship with the Art Sheds can be summed up in his own words:

The Sheds and all they contained, I could enjoy without any responsibility... they served the same purpose as the Repertory Theatre.....When tired of the bickerings of the Senate and one's colleagues one could escape to the artists and their students and join in their pranks and parties.⁹⁷

If Reilly did not view his art students with the same degree of respect that he reserved for his architectural students, there were others in the University who did. The University magazine *The Sphinx* carried regular reports about the work of the Department and what an asset it was to the University. In 1904 when the University achieved independent status and it was known that the Art Section was to be transferred to the Liverpool School of Art in Mount Street a letter appeared in *The Sphinx*. The author expressed his dismay that the Department's link would be severed with the University and went on to praise the talent that existed there and the contribution the students had made to the University generally.⁹⁸

The Art Sheds and The Della Robbia Pottery

In the very limited written history of the Della Robbia Pottery Company and the even more limited documentation on the women artists, prominence is given to the fact that Cassandra Walker, Ruth Bare, Annie Smith and Hannah Jones were known to have attended evening classes at the Art Sheds. The Sessions Registers give basic details about the students, their ages, addresses, occupations and which classes they were enrolled in.⁹⁹ The registers unfortunately exist only for the years 1901-1905. Cassandra Walker was registered for the 1901-1902 evening classes in design and antique, the 1903-1904 summer term only for enamelling classes and the 1904-5 evening classes in enamelling. This interest in enamelling is reflected in the exhibits she submitted to the Autumn Exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery in 1907. The two exhibits were both enamelled panels, one being titled *Lilies* the other *Enamel Panel, After J Hamilton Hay*. Enamelling was taught by the only woman tutor employed by the department, Lily Day. Cassandra does not appear in the register for the 1902-3 Session. The likely explanation for this is that 1902 was the year that Harold Rathbone had succeeded in obtaining a stand at the Cork International Exhibition for the Della Robbia Pottery. This was a working exhibition lasting for six months and as such she would physically need to be present in Cork. The other significant point about the information is that in the registers her occupation is given as that of a *designer*.

Cassandra was probably well known in the University art circles. There are several

references to her in *The Sphinx*, the University students' magazine, in which the art students had their own correspondent and their own column. One praised a design for a drinking fountain submitted by her to the Annual Students Exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery.¹⁰⁰ The other is far more significant:

The Liverpool School of Architecture and Applied Art Sketch Club was asked by the Sphinx Committee to design a poster that would be used monthly to advertise *The Sphinx*.....The Sphinx Committee have chosen Miss Walker's poster, which they will issue in due course.¹⁰¹

There is a description of the artistic merits of the poster and of the artist's work. The magazine reproduced an illustration of the winning poster with the caption "designed by Miss C. Walker" and I have verified in the registers there was only one C. Walker, namely Cassandra Walker. The poster was used for the Magazine for 1901-2 (see illustration 5). Other names discovered in the Art Sheds Registers also help to clarify some of the links with the Pottery. For example an exhibit at the Autumn Exhibition of 1898 was a Della Robbia sgraffito sculpture panel listed jointly under the names of Cassandra Walker and M. I. Pollexfen. May Isabel Pollexfen's name appears in the Sessions Register for the years 1901-1902. Fanny Cox Palethorpe was another Art Sheds student. She was a militant member of the Women's Suffrage Movement and served a period of imprisonment in Holloway for her actions in the movement. Cassandra Walker shared a studio in Colquitt Chambers for some years with her sister, the artist Mary Cox Palethorpe, a well-known Liverpool suffragist. Further research would probably reveal other connections.

The Sandon School of Art.

The 1902 Education Act placed additional burdens on Liverpool Corporation and the decision was taken not to run two separate art schools providing the same type of education. Thus in 1905 the University Art School was closed and amalgamated with the Mount Street School. Charles Reilly may have been quietly relieved by this event. He enjoyed the company of the art students and the amateur dramatics that they put on but at the same time he did not see the relevance of their crafts to architecture. In his autobiography his explanation for the Corporation's decision was as follows:

The subtle connection between making silver rings and enamel broaches for one's girl friend with architecture was naturally not so clear to them.¹⁰²

One of the consequences of the closure of the Art Sheds was the setting up of a private art institution by some of the former students and the staff. In a letter written some years after the event Charles Reilly put forward the suggestion that it was fear of the old South Kensington rigidity in art teaching that had led to this move.¹⁰³ Many of the students and some of the staff were unhappy about the closure and what they saw as the end of a little share of the Parisian art culture in Liverpool. There is no doubt the students at the Art Sheds enjoyed a special relationship with their tutors and benefited from tuition from men who were masters of their own crafts. A small core of wealthy students reluctant to lose what they had had at the Art Sheds were sufficiently motivated to try and set up a similar art school. Consequently classes similar to those of the Art Sheds were organised in a building in Sandon Terrace. The prospectus for the new Sandon School (as it became known) emphasised this continuity of the Art Sheds ethos. It listed Herbert MacNair and Gerald Chowne as principal lecturers with Robert Anning Bell, Richard Rathbone and Augustus John as visiting tutors. The students had the use of the studios and the opportunities to observe the work of some of the leading artists of the day who exhibited there, as for example George Frampton. Support for the project came from Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and his sister-in-law Francis McNair is listed as offering embroidery classes.¹⁰⁴

In its own way the Sandon Group provided opportunities for another section of Liverpool women to access art education. The driving forces behind the new school were Fanny Dove Lister, a wealthy art student and Catherine Qwatkin. Evidence of those who organised this new school would suggest that they were on the whole from the wealthier section of the student population and from families with some status. It was reputed that many of the ladies from the best Liverpool families had come to gaze on Anning Bell when he taught in the Art Sheds. One of the students, Beatrice Herdman was quoted as saying "Of course some of us were not really gifted and we were only passing time but we really enjoyed it."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless these

women had been brought up on the strong Victorian and Edwardian concepts of class and culture and would have had some difficulty in mixing with the predominantly working and lower middle classes that they perceived to be the core of the Mount Street School. The Sandon Group gave them the opportunity to continue their studies in what would have been for them a sociably more acceptable environment. Some of the women, despite Beatrice Herdman's comments, did go on to have careers in the arts.

A big difference between this private school and the Mount Street School was the fees charged. The sessions register for 1901-1905 show that fees at Mount Street were in the order of 3/6d to 5/- for a class per term whereas the Sandon group charged 6 guineas for full time day students or 10/- per term per evening class. In addition there were no free places or scholarships available at the Sandon Group. Although numbers enrolled in the first year reached 100, this was not sustained and the revenue income was not sufficient to support the salaries of MacNair and Chowne. The school ceased to function in 1908 but continued as an art society.

Private or Public? The Sandon School or Mount Street?

Ruth Bare and Cassandra Walker may have been classified by some as coming from the right social background to have joined the Sandon School. Cassandra is reputed to have been a rather aloof young lady who came from a wealthy family. Ruth came from a professional background, her father being an architect of some local repute. Neither woman appears in the membership list of the Sandon Group. In fact in the case of Cassandra Walker the reverse happened and the evidence is that she registered at Mount Street. Her experience of tuition from both schools is evident in the surviving examples of her work. These show the influence of the Art Nouveau as defined by the "Glasgow Four" under the influence of Herbert MacNair at the Art Sheds. An excellent example of this is demonstrated by the design for a fountain submitted to the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition in 1901 and illustrated in *The Studio*.¹⁰⁶ MacNair must have also transferred to the new amalgamated Art School in Mount Street because records show he resigned from his post there in 1905. His

successor appointed was Léon Solon the great exponent of the Art Nouveau from the Minton Pottery.¹⁰⁷ Solon however remained for less than a year resigning in July 1906 from whence he went to America.¹⁰⁸

Examination of students registered at the new amalgamated Art School reinforces the fact that those who were serious about their art continued to study there. An important contributory fact may have been the timing of classes which were such that women whether working or not could take advantage of them. Finance also had to be an important factor. Liverpool Corporation continued to offer to talented students free tuition as well as travelling scholarships to those who wished to study in London or abroad. Effectively these were to fine art students but there were also craft scholarships that were open to students who were already engaged in paid employment in the decorative arts. From reading the Art School Minutes Book it can be deduced that Cassandra Walker must have been the holder of one of these Craft Scholarships since when she found she was unable to comply with the regulations of the scholarship due to her work commitments, the committee amended the regulations to accommodate the circumstances of such students.¹⁰⁹ There is one final aspect of Cassandra Walker's art education, which is relevant and that is her attendance at the Westminster School of Art. At this period the well-respected Frederick Brown was the headmaster and under his rule the school had a high reputation for drawing and painting from the nude.¹¹⁰ Cassandra's attendance could have been a reflection in her particular interest and ability in sculpture. Of all the arts sculpture seemed to have been one of the most difficult areas for women to break into. At that particular time, the Westminster School of Art was situated in Tufton Street in the same building as the London Architectural Museum.¹¹¹

Art Education for Men in Liverpool and the Men at the Della Robbia Pottery.

This chapter has concentrated on the opportunities for women to receive an art education in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the male situation has been predominantly ignored. This is the result of trying to justify that in Liverpool at least there were good opportunities for a section of the female population to get an art

education. The assumption could be made that there were no problems for men because as feminist historians point out art institutions were male dominated and *de facto* any man with talent or ability could make progress. Again Liverpool and the Della Robbia Pottery are good subjects to analyse the reality.

There were three divisions of male artists who were involved in the Della Robbia Pottery. The first group included men like Edward Burne-Jones and Ford Madox Brown who allowed their designs to be copied at the pottery. Examples of this are the plaques of the *Six Days of Creation* by Burne-Jones and the plaque *Alfred Ye Greate* designed by Ford Madox Brown. The second group were those who designed specifically for the pottery but on a commission basis. This group included Charles Allen the sculptor, Robert Anning Bell, Benjamin Creswick and the architect Thomas Edward Collcutt. The latter was responsible for the fountain built for the Savoy Hotel in London, which no longer exists. Both of these groups of males either came from artistic families or had independent financial means or in the case of Creswick had been taken up by a patron, in his case John Ruskin. It is the third group of men who are the most important as far as this study is concerned, and that is the group of men who worked full-time at the pottery for a weekly wage. Included in this group are Charles Collis, Tom Hall, John Fogo and John Shirley. Very little is known of the latter two and the remit of this thesis does not allow the opportunity for research on their backgrounds. Tom Hall won a scholarship from his primary school to study at the Liverpool School of Art but left when he was seventeen years old to join the pottery. He was considered to be very talented but he also left the company after a short while to take up employment as an illuminator. John Shirley was a young lad who had neither arms nor legs but painted with a brush in his mouth. Nothing is known of his educational background but his father was "the boss" at the Davenport Pottery in Staffordshire and presumably may have had some instruction in that connection. He left Liverpool to go to Australia and as a result of an inheritance there, came back a very wealthy man. David Hillhouse of the Williamson Art Gallery interviewed John Fogo in 1979 before his death and consequently there is more biographical knowledge of him. John went to work at the Della Robbia Pottery after leaving school and again obviously had some artistic talent. He recounts how Harold

Rathbone wanted to give him art tuition and if he did then one day he would have RA after his name. John remained at the pottery for three years earning 10/- per week and then left to further his career as a draughtsman.¹¹²

Charles Collis is the one male artist at the pottery about whom there is a moderate but not enormous knowledge. He grew up in Birkenhead and is reputed to have joined the pottery straight from school. Collis himself said he started at the pottery in June 1895, this would have meant he was almost 16 years old when he joined.¹¹³ This also coincides with his earliest dated work of circa 1895. The implication is that he must have spent some time at an art school, possibly the Laird School of Art in Birkenhead. He himself recounts that he left the Della Robbia Company in 1900 to go and work at Doulton's in Stoke-on-Trent where it is understood that he attended Burslem School of Art. Of all the men who worked at the pottery he was probably the most talented and the one most determined to succeed as an artist. But like all the others he was forced to take up other work, in his case as an illustrator. Post cards written to his family when he worked for a time at a pottery in Derbyshire tell of his struggle to get further art training.¹¹⁴ The struggle was based on the need to earn a living and the conflict and the despair this caused for him. Charles's plight in Edwardian England appears to be an echo of the plight of female artists in early Victorian England, perhaps demonstrating that economic factors could be a greater stumbling block to obtaining an art education than gender ones. The plight of male artists forced to give up their careers for economic reasons is a potentially rich area for further research.

Conclusion.

To conclude, throughout more than half a century, Liverpool had tried to provide for their women of all social classes some form of quality art education. This is during a period when the overall picture depicted, although one of gradual improvement by the end of the nineteenth century, was still one of struggle and disappointment. Many of our preconceptions of women's status and thwarted ambitions in the nineteenth century art world rest on the writings of powerful feminist artists like Barbara Bodichon and Jessie Macgregor. Even though Barbara Bodichon campaigned in the

1860's and 70's and Jessie Macgregor in the 1880's, their views seem to linger through time. As already noted women like them were exceptionally talented and articulate in their campaign for equal opportunities for women. They were usually well connected in the art world and as a result have received specific attention from art historians. In this chapter I have tried to propose that inequality and apparent lack of opportunity may have not been the true overall picture. Even in today's liberated egalitarian society the number of nationally esteemed female artists and also male artists is comparatively small in relation to the number of students who obtain degrees in the decorative or fine arts. Reassessing the role of provincial arts schools like Liverpool can open up the debate that opportunities were more positive and readily available to women than has previously been acknowledged. In doing so the attention should be focused in more detail on the lives and comments of the students who went to make up those provincial schools, students such as Marian de Caluwé, Cassandra Annie Walker, Ruth Bare and Charles Collis. The final word should be left to a Liverpool student, Alice Horton, an artist of some talent and a frequent medal winner in the National Examinations. Writing in the Liverpool School of Art student journal *The Cloud* in December 1899, she commented that if the journal had been written at the end of the eighteenth century instead of the nineteenth century, no one would have looked for any mention of women's work. Although she respected her genteel ancestors, she was grateful for the wider horizons women now enjoyed.¹¹⁵

Illustration 2. Blackburne House School. Illustration from Herbert Tiffen's book *A History of the Liverpool Institute Schools 1820-1935*, facing page 103.

Blackburne House School, 1820-1935. Illustration from Herbert Tiffen's book *A History of the Liverpool Institute Schools 1820-1935*, facing page 103.

Illustration 3. A Blackburne House Girl of the 1880s. Newspaper cutting 1944, untitled and unclassified, Liverpool Record Office.

Illustration 4. The Liverpool School of Art 1883. Illustration from Herbert Tiffen's book *A History of the Liverpool Institute Schools 1820-1935*, facing page 115.

Illustration 5. Photograph of the Advanced Antique Class Liverpool School of Art circa 1900-1906. Liverpool John Moore's University Archives.

Illustration 6. Design cover for *The Sphinx* by Cassandra Walker illustrated in *The Sphinx* 8 (January 1901): 153.

Illustration 7. Chalk and pastel drawing by Marion Walker of one of her sisters in Gypsy Costume circa 1900. In private ownership, photographed by the writer.

Notes Chapter Two

¹Bell, *The Schools of Design*; Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: London University Press, 1987); Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press 1987); Charlotte Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth Century France and England* (London and New York: Garland Press, 1984); Cherry, *Painting Women*; Sarah Dodd, "Art Education for Women," in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

²*Fifth Report of the Council of the Schools of Design* (1846), 11; quoted in Bell, *Schools of Design*, 135.

³Cecil Stewart, *Art in Adversity: A Short History of the Regional College of Art Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester Royal Institution, 1954), 8.

⁴Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*, 145-178.

⁵The pieces were (1) Panel, *The First Day of Creation*, (2) Statue, *St. Clare*, (3) Panel, *Isota Di Rimini*, (4) Statue, *Virgin Mary*, (5) Red porridge bowl, (6) Red vase with painting of the Madonna, (7) Panel, *The Adoration* (8) Statue, *Joan of Arc*.

⁶In 1893 Walter Crane was Director of Design at Manchester School of Art and later Principal of the Royal College of Art. In 1896 William Lethaby was the joint Director of the new Central School of Arts and Crafts.

⁷Later in the chapter I will discuss the question of "life classes" since I believe there is some confusion about the exact meaning of these words.

⁸Charlotte J. Weeks, "Women at Work: The Slade Girls," *The Magazine of Art* 6 (1883): 325.

⁹Elizabeth Ellett, *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries* (London: Bentley, 1859).

¹⁰Katherine Marian Genn was born on the 30th March 1847 in West Derby, Liverpool into a Unitarian family. She married Emile de Caluwé on the 7th June 1876 at the Catholic Church of Saint Philip Neri, Catherine Street Liverpool; Registers of Birth Marriages and Deaths. In David Hillhouse's *Interim Report* the de Caluwés have been described as a wealthy French family but Emile was in fact Belgian. See Entwistle Papers 942 Ent.13 at the Liverpool Records office. Katherine's great niece and nephew Pamela and John Hawke Genn also confirmed his Belgian origins in an interview with the writer on 19th April 2000.

¹¹John Ruskin had written to Harold's father Philip Rathbone to offer help and advice with his art if so needed, Private Papers of Joy Robinson, Harold's Rathbone's niece.

¹²John Hawke Genn originated from Falmouth and is listed in *Ham's Year Book* of 1876 as a second class surveyor. Blackburne House School Registers, Liverpool Record Office show that there were 4 Genn girls, this information later confirmed by descendents.

¹³See interview with John Fogo by David Hillhouse 1979, John Fogo File Williamson Museum and Art Gallery Archives, Birkenhead.

¹⁴All modern references to this artist refer to her as Cassandra but her birth certificate gives her name as Cassandra.

¹⁵As for example Sotheby's sold a 19-inch plaque by Cassandra Walker in 1989 for £1,320 and Christie's sold a 24" high vase by Charles Collis in 1992 for £660.

¹⁶See Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth Century France and England*, 39.

¹⁷Information from Cassandra's great niece indicated an Italian ancestor had been an artist. Date of birth obtained from Registers of Birth, Marriages and Deaths. Early in the research I was unable to trace a register of her death. Contact with a surviving great niece revealed she had emigrated from England to Canada and died there in 1936. The death certificate was obtained from the British Columbia Registers. Father's occupation obtained from the 1881 Census.

¹⁸A codicil in her father's will dated 1918 indicated she had married. Marriage Certificate obtained from British Columbia Registers.

¹⁹These details were already known about Ruth Bare, see Ruth Bare File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Archives, Birkenhead.

²⁰Letter from her son F. C. W. Baier to David Hillhouse 24th September 1979, Williamson Archives.

- ²¹Information obtained from his marriage certificate and Articles of Memorandum of the 1900 Della Robbia Pottery Company.
- ²²Gore's Liverpool Street Directories, which were researched over 30 years to trace details on the De Caluwé family.
- ²³The others were Ambrose, Pauline and Adrian, 1881 Census.
- ²⁴Charles gives his date of birth as 18th June 1879, Charles Collis File Williamson Art Gallery Archives. The Interim report by David Hillhouse gives his dates as 1880c-1967. Register of Births Marriages and Deaths confirms Charles's own dates as correct.
- ²⁵For a discussion of the role of designer see Buckley, *Potters and Paintresses*, 2-3.
- ²⁶John Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History 1558-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 173. See also his Chapter 11 on Property, Authority and Culture.
- ²⁷*Annual Report of the Government School of Art, Established in Connection with the Collegiate Institute, Liverpool* (Liverpool: 1855), 5. National Art Library; Liverpool Council, *Technical Instruction Regulations as to the Conditions upon which Grants-in-Aid are made to Schools and Classes* (Liverpool: 1894), 25.
- ²⁸For a full history see John Willet, *Art in a City* (London: Methuen and Company, 1967).
- ²⁹Herbert J. Tiffen, *A History of the Liverpool Institute Schools 1820-1935* (Liverpool: Liverpool Institute Old Boys Association, 1935), 113.
- ³⁰For a fuller discussion of these issues see Bell, *The Schools of Design*; Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement*, Chapter One; Cherry, *Painting Women*, Chapter Three.
- ³¹Colin Morris, *History of Liverpool Regional College of Art 1825-1970* (M. Phil. Thesis, Liverpool Polytechnic, 1985).
- ³²Bell, *The Schools of Design*, 100.
- ³³Edward Morris, "Provincial Internationalism: Contemporary Foreign Art in Nineteenth Century Liverpool and Manchester," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 147 (1998): 91.
- ³⁴Tiffen, *A History of the Liverpool Institute Schools 1820-1935*, 103.
- ³⁵The famous Winnington Hall Girls School founded by Margaret Bell with the support of John Ruskin was not opened until 1850 and Cheltenham Ladies College not until 1853.
- ³⁶Tiffen, *A History of the Liverpool Institute Schools 1820-1935*, 103-104.
- ³⁷The school hours were 8-45am until 11-45 and 1-45pm until 4-45. Books, Slates, writing and drawing books, pencils etc. were supplied free of charge. The pupils also had the use of a fine library and French was included in the syllabus for additional fees. Ibid., 104. The School Registers show that Marian De Caluwé attended French lessons which presumably allowed her to communicate in French with her husband and hence the perception they were a French family. Blackburne House School Registers.
- ³⁸Tiffen, *A History of the Liverpool Institute Schools*, 105.
- ³⁹He exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery, the Royal Cambrian Academy and also at the Royal Academy. His work can still be seen at the Walker Art Gallery.
- ⁴⁰It appears that this was the case up to 1901. The Minutes of the Liverpool Institute Art and Evening Classes for February 1901 recommended that the girls be taught art in their own school because of the demands for daytime classes in the Art School
- ⁴¹Liverpool Institute Prospectus (Liverpool: 1860), 24.
- ⁴²Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 30th September 1886.
- ⁴³"Art-Work for Women 11". Why the Work is Not Done," *The Art Journal* (April 1872): 102.
- ⁴⁴The Secretary of the girls school committee, reported in the Minutes of the Girls School Committee, 25th March 1861... "a letter he had received from John Ruskin Esq. respecting his method of teaching drawing at the London Working Men's College, promised specimens of the students work.... And in consideration of the question of teaching of drawing at the girl's school was deferred until these should arrive."
- ⁴⁵Principal's Letter Books, 24th November 1905.

- ⁴⁶ See Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 26th August 1857. See *Report of the Examiners on Works sent from Schools of Art in the Competitions for the National Medallions* published by the Science and Art Department of the Committee of the Council of Education Department 1861, 62, 63, 64 and 65.
- ⁴⁷ Blackburne House School Registers 1858-1864.
- ⁴⁸ Information obtained from *Gore's Liverpool Street and Trades Directory*.
- ⁴⁹ A work by Ellen Genn featured in the 1996 Exhibition of women painters in Cornwall. See Catherine Wallace, *Women Artists in Cornwall 1880-1940* (Falmouth: Falmouth Town Council, 1996), 31.
- ⁵⁰ See various entries in *Diary of Henry Scott Tuke*, Transcribed by B D P 1980, Falmouth Library.
- ⁵¹ *Gore's Liverpool Street Directories* 1875-1900; 1891 Census.
- ⁵² Interview with great niece Miss Walker September 2001.
- ⁵³ Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Archives.
- ⁵⁴ Blackburne House continued to function as girls' school up to the mid-1980's and is currently used as a women's centre.
- ⁵⁵ Annual Report of Directors of the Liverpool Institute (1885), 13-14. Discussion took place on the fact that the Liverpool School of Art has never appealed to the public for help as other art schools had.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁵⁷ See Bell, *Schools of Design*, 104-107.
- ⁵⁸ John C. Sparkes, *Schools of Art, Their Origin, History, Work, and Influence* (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd., 1884), 110.
- ⁵⁹ Liverpool Institute School of Art Minutes, 28th May 1858.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1st November 1888.
- ⁶¹ Department of Education, *Reports of the National Competitions*, 1900-1910.
- ⁶² *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Royal College of Art* (London: HMSO, 1912) and quoted as being totally inaccurate by Frank Brown in Frank Brown, *South Kensington and Its Training* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), 26.
- ⁶³ Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 26th August 1857.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 30th May 1867.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 30th October and 2nd September 1874.
- ⁶⁶ Department of Science and Art, *Report on the National Competitions of the Works of the Schools of Art*, 1899; Department of Education, *National Competitions*, 1900-1914.
- ⁶⁷ Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 28th September 1900.
- ⁶⁸ Francis Ford, "The Aims and Needs of Art Schools," *Arts and Crafts Magazine* 4 (1905-6): 100.
- ⁶⁹ Annual Report of the Directors of the Liverpool Institute 1869.
- ⁷⁰ Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 31st October 1872.
- ⁷¹ Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, 167.
- ⁷² Morris, *History of the Liverpool Regional College of Art 1825-1970*, 71.
- ⁷³ Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 27th April 1882.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, December 1st 1887.
- ⁷⁵ Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 30th May 1888.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, January 29th 1891 and April 13th 1891.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, December 4th 1896. Gwendoline Buckler was the daughter of the Vicar of Bidston and an artist who also worked at the Della Robbia Pottery.
- ⁷⁸ A detailed explanation of the Art Sheds appears later in this chapter.
- ⁷⁹ Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 4th December 1896.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2nd November 1900; Hillhouse, *Interim Report*, 1981, section 12, unpaginated.
- ⁸¹ Students still had to take their exams through London University until 1903 when Edward the Seventh signed the charter giving the University independent status.
- ⁸² Minutes of the Liverpool University College Senate, 22nd February 1893.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 26th March 1884.

- ⁸⁴Letter dated 22nd May 1884, which was inserted into the Senate's Minutes. I am grateful to Adrian Allan, the Liverpool University Archivist for searching out this reference for me.
- ⁸⁵Charles Herbert Reilly, *Scaffolding in the Sky* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1935), 83.
- ⁸⁶Two of the students registered in her class for 1901-2 were Cassandra Walker and Francis MacNair the latter going on to teach enamelling and goldsmithing at Glasgow School of Art.
- ⁸⁷The "Glasgow Four" were Charles Rennie Mackintosh, his wife Margaret Macdonald, her sister Francis Macdonald and Francis's husband Herbert MacNair.
- ⁸⁸Roger Billcliffe, "J H MacNair in Glasgow and Liverpool," *Walker Art Gallery Annual Report and Bulletin* 1 (1970-71): 53.
- ⁸⁹Reilly, *Scaffolding in the Sky*, 85.
- ⁹⁰Michael Holroyd, *Augustus John Volume One: The years of Innocence* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 128.
- ⁹¹*Ibid.*, 131.
- ⁹²Billcliffe, "J. H. MacNair in Glasgow and Liverpool," 53.
- ⁹³Edward Taylor was also an examiner for South Kensington. In 1898 he founded the Ruskin Pottery in conjunction with his son W. Howson Taylor.
- ⁹⁴Marion E. Walker's relationship to Cassandra Walker was confirmed by the 1891 Census. Her great niece has in her possession a pastel drawing circa 1902 by Marion of another sister dressed in the traditional gypsy costume, obviously influenced by Augustus John's strong interest in the gypsy community.
- ⁹⁵Interview with Doreen Walker by the writer at her home in 2000.
- ⁹⁶Principal's Letter Books, 24th November 1905.
- ⁹⁷Reilly, *Scaffolding in the Sky*, 91.
- ⁹⁸*The Sphinx* 11 (July 1904): 168-170. The author was B.B.B.B. and the address the Law Library.
- ⁹⁹Sessions Registers 1901-1905, The Department of Applied Art, University College Liverpool.
- ¹⁰⁰*Sphinx* 8 (June 1901): 343.
- ¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, (January 1901): 153.
- ¹⁰²Reilly, *Scaffolding in the Sky*, 85.
- ¹⁰³Charles Reilly, Letter in Miscellaneous File, Topographical Newspaper, Cuttings, Societies and Institutions, 1929-1940, Liverpool Record Office.
- ¹⁰⁴1905 Prospectus, Topographical Newspaper Cuttings, Societies and Institutions 1929-1940, Liverpool Record Office.
- ¹⁰⁵Roderick F. Bisson, *The Sandon Studios Society and the Arts* (Liverpool: Parry Books Limited on behalf of the Sandon Studio Society, 1965), 9.
- ¹⁰⁶*The Studio* (1901): 276.
- ¹⁰⁷Herbert MacNair resigned on Monday 6th November 1905 and Leon Solon commenced on Tuesday 7th November 1905, Principal's Letter Books, 27th November 1905.
- ¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, July 12th 1906.
- ¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, April 26th 1907.
- ¹¹⁰Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, 274.
- ¹¹¹Cassandra must have submitted her work circa 1898 for one of the Travelling Scholarship awarded by Liverpool City Council. She was unsuccessful and it was awarded to George Fish. However, the minutes went on to say that "The work submitted by another candidate Miss C. A. Walker from the School of Architecture and Arts was so good that the Committee on the strong recommendation of the Examiners made her a special grant of £20 to enable her to continue her studies which she is doing in London at the Westminster School of Art." Minutes of the Proceedings of the Liverpool Technical Instruction Committee (1898-99), 43.
- ¹¹²John Fogo File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Archives.
- ¹¹³Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Archives.
- ¹¹⁴Charles' sister Miss Collis deposited these postcards at the Williamson Art Gallery after Charles'

death.

¹¹⁵ Alice Horton, "Women and Art," *The Cloud, An Artistic Adventure*, 1 (December 1899): 8-9.

CHAPTER THREE

Work Opportunities for Women

Fiction often owes its origins to fact and nearly all the great writers of this form of art have used their own knowledge and experience of life as they perceive it, as a platform on which to launch their literary works. It is therefore appropriate to start this chapter with some discussion on two novels, one written in 1848, the year after which Marian de Caluwé was born, the other in 1894, the year the Della Robbia Pottery opened. Anne Brontë's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* tells the story of an upper class girl locked in an abusive marriage.¹ There are passing references in the early pages of the book to her interest and ability in painting. When she decides to escape from her unhappy life, her plan is to earn her living by painting oil pictures. These she will sell anonymously through her brother to the art market. She is confident that these works will earn her enough money to support herself, her 3 year old son and her trusted servant, in the basic necessities of life. The reader is given no clue as to where her skill in art is derived from or what experience she has in selling her works. What we do know is she mainly paints portraits and landscapes. With no apparent reputation or public acknowledgement of her profession, she succeeds.

Over 50 years later a little known book by Ella Dixon called *A Modern Woman* originally written in 1894, also tells the story, this time of a lower middle class girl who due to the untimely death of her father is forced to consider ways of earning her living.² She too is blighted in love but nevertheless is determined to become an artist. She studied at the South Kensington School of Design and had ambitions to continue her studies at the Royal Academy School. She failed to gain entry to this prestigious establishment Her failure in her mind is due to her gender and the inevitable prejudice that she encounters in the assessment of her work by the examiners. As a result of this failure to gain admittance to this "Temple of High Art", through male prejudice, she is destined to earn her living by taking on work in illustrating books or writing articles for magazines but never to work as a "true artist".

Various issues highlighted in this brief précis of the two novels are central to the whole question of women's work and the opportunities available to them in mid to late Victorian England. They also highlight the conflicting perceptions by society of the real situation for women artists in this period. In a sense logic would dictate the earlier novel would demonstrate greater difficulties encountered by women than the later one. The reverse seems to be true. Half way through the nineteenth century the novelist Anne Brontë did not seem to see any major social or moral barriers to her heroine earning her living from her art. It would also appear that there was no lack of demand in the art market for the completed works. In contrast in the last few remaining years of the same century, the novelist Ella Dixon paints a very bleak picture of the environment in which women struggle for their art. Women's abilities are considered inferior to men as evidenced by the heroine's failure to gain her place at the Royal Academy thus denying her a future in her chosen career. Importantly this failure condemns her to a life in the decorative arts, an apparent second best to fine art. This tendency for novelists to create an idealised view on the ease of succeeding as an artist must have been a fairly common occurrence, given the advice proffered by Florence Reason to would be artists in a nineteenth century book on paid employment for women.³ She warns about the hard work involved and the ultimate success being confined to the minority and not to be misled by romantic novels such as *Vanity Fair*.

Most people are beginning now to understand that the power of painting even fairly well comes after years of downright hard work to the majority of art students; and the exceptions are so few it is wiser to consider oneself as one of the majority and not as a genius.⁴

Both novels highlight some of the issues, which have fascinated art and social historians for many generations. Most pertinent of all the issues, and acknowledged as an indisputable one by both the novelists and by all art historians, is the fact that the occupation of an artist was considered by society as respectable and therefore socially and morally acceptable. It is for this reason that when analysing the historical development of social and economic equality for women, art takes on an importance, which is no longer

applicable or significant in modern society.

The struggles to gain equality in art education have been well-documented in women's history as pointed out in the last chapter.⁵ The next stage in an artist's life that of employment, appears at first to mirror the first stage. Again it is the verbal and written onslaughts by Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Raynor Parkes on the economic short-sightedness of institutions in refusing to see the logic of equality of opportunity for the future employment of women that are highlighted in many feminist histories.⁶ Contemporary biographies of women artists like Henrietta Rae (Mrs. Normand) and the collective biographical work by Ellen Clayton emphasise the struggles they had to overcome to achieve success.⁷ Sometimes it appears that the situations have been exaggerated causing a degree of confusion in interpretation for historians. Sometimes it is the artists themselves who are guilty of causing this confusion. Jessie Macgregor's account of her life as an artist is a case in point. When her parents moved to Liverpool in the early 1870's she complained about the lack of good models in the city and the paucity of art facilities.⁸ Unless the reader has an in depth knowledge of the art facilities in Liverpool, then Jessie Macgregor's comments are likely to be taken at face value. As we know from the previous chapter Liverpool was well served in this field. Jessie Macgregor's comments are more likely to be based on her reluctance to move from London rather than the situation in Liverpool itself.⁹ Again perhaps by giving weight to the experiences of the famous few, some of the misconceptions about the quality and the opportunity of employment in art related occupations are perpetuated. The aim therefore of this chapter is to try and examine some of these issues raised in relation to work opportunities for artists in the Liverpool setting and in particular in the light of the experiences of the Della Robbia women. Experiences of their male colleagues need to be subjected to the same analysis in order to establish whether any conclusions are gender based or economic. These issues concern the availability of local employment thereby avoiding the necessity of artists having to move to London. They also concern the opportunities to earn a living either as a fine artist or as a decorative artist.

The Need for Women to Work.

There can be no doubt that by the middle of the nineteenth century there was a growing economic necessity for middle class women to work. The indisputable evidence for this is contained in the census returns. These returns were a genuine attempt to abstract and collate information but early efforts to collect such massive data in comparatively primitive circumstances were bound to contain anomalies. For example those collecting the information were not always working from the same baseline; those giving the information were not always cognisant of what was required; and most importantly of all social and personal needs led to deliberate misinformation being supplied to the enumerators. With these caveats in mind the returns are a source of vital information to historians in analysing social trends from the 1850's to the early 1900s.¹⁰

Census figures for these years clearly indicate that not only was the total population growing rapidly but the imbalance between the numbers of male and females was also increasing, with female outnumbering the male. The economic implications of this for women are self-evident. In a society where the male role was seen as the provider for the female, many women would have to take on this role for themselves. These women were usually single, with no male protector and often left impecunious by the sudden death of their fathers. Others belonged to the growing number of women widowed with or without young children. Emily Mary Osborne's painting *Nameless and Friendless* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1857 depicts the vulnerability of such women. This growing number of middle class ladies needing to be self-supporting was reflected in the content of the campaigns spearheaded by Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Raynor Parkes. Their fight was not on behalf of the poorly paid working classes but on behalf of the respectable middle classes.¹¹ Working class women had always needed to supplement their family income and the upper classes had never needed to consider income except in exceptional cases. The plight of middle class women was a new phenomenon.

The Types of Work Deemed Acceptable for Women.

Defining class is not always easy and historians have used various models on which to base their definitions. Even the categories used in the census returns on which social

classes were based did not remain constant. Attribution of class based on paternal occupation seems to be the one that satisfies most criteria and the one used for the purposes of this study. It needs to be acknowledged however, that occupations in the fine arts and the decorative arts can pose special problems in trying to define class. For most of the period of this study the decorative arts were considered more of a trade and consequently those employed in this work judged socially inferior compared to those working in the fine arts, which were considered true art and therefore socially superior.

The types of work open to women were generally circumscribed by the social class to which they belonged. Traditionally women and children from the working classes had always had to work out of economic necessity and they had always been employed in low paid and physically demanding jobs. The work might be based in the home, as in dressmaking and lace making or in the factory, as in the Lancashire cotton mills or the coal mines. The one thing they all had in common was the physically exhausting work, the low pay, the repetitiveness and the long hours. With the introduction of legislation on the ages and conditions under which children were allowed to work, manufacturers turned their attention to young single girls as the new source of cheap labour.

An important and interesting exception to this trend was highlighted by Amy Harrison (the 1902 Jevon's Scholar at Liverpool University) in a survey she was commissioned to do under the auspices of the University College in Liverpool in 1904, on the occupations of women in the city.¹² She found that the working classes in Liverpool considered it a matter of male pride and status to be able to support the women in their families without the necessity for them to work.¹³ (Despite the fact that Amy Harrison also discovered that there was a very high proportion of married women in Liverpool who were either widowed or deserted.) Consequently the fashion in Liverpool was for the girls over ten years of age and unmarried not to work since this was considered somewhat of a disgrace for them to have to earn their own living.¹⁴ This was a surprising and unexpected conclusion to arrive at for an area like Liverpool. The system of casual labour in the Liverpool docks was considered the root cause of the extremes of poverty for the working classes in the city. Supplementary wages from women would have been thought

absolutely essential to maintain survival levels. Indeed it was the casual wages system that many families lived with, experienced by Eleanor Rathbone in her younger days of social work in the city, that eventually inspired her successful campaign for family allowances in the early 1930's. But generally working class women needed to work to supplement the low family incomes and in Liverpool the opportunities were very limited. These were confined to the few industries that owed their existence to the fact Liverpool was a port. These industries based on imports of tobacco, sugar and jute required mainly unskilled labour. Another important discovery in Amy Harrison's survey was that there was very little competition between the male and female workforces for employment since what was available for men was not suitable for women and vice-versa.¹⁵ Traditionally the women in the Staffordshire potteries suffered very badly from this type of competition between male and female employees because some of the better paid work suitable for both sexes was perceived as male owned and dominated.

In comparison with the working classes the variety of occupations opened to respectable middle class ladies was very limited. In the mid-nineteenth century these predominantly revolved around work as governesses or teachers. We know that Blackburne House School in Liverpool which had been set up mainly for the girls of middle-class families, had the foresight very early on in its history to provide a course for young women who wanted to train as teachers. Marian de Caluwé's sister Caroline was one such pupil and this training enabled her to open her own private school in Blundellsands. Marion Walker, Cassandra's sister as we also know worked for a short time as a schoolteacher, a generation later.¹⁶

Another occupation which was considered respectable and morally safe for young middle class ladies to work in was as paintresses in the potteries. (The pottery industry was an unusual industry in very many ways, particularly in its structure and it is one that will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.) As the century progressed, with the advent of the typewriter for example, more opportunities became available in the clerical and secretarial sphere. Another new area of opportunity, which opened up and which was also considered respectable was in the new department stores. (Owen Owens in Liverpool

being the first one in the country.) Towards the end of the century there appeared to be a blurring at the edges of the boundaries between the upper working and lower middle classes as far as certain occupations were concerned. At the other end of the spectrum the minority of middle class women who had access to university education was also slowly growing.¹⁷ This meant that women were slowly infiltrating some of the previously male only professions like medicine.

Therefore if we analyse female society from approximately 1850-1900 in terms of class and occupations we will find:

- a) The lower working classes generally were associated with hard manual work as in the large industrial potteries, the coal mines or rope making.
- b) The upper working classes were associated with clerical work, shop work, teaching and some of the lesser skilled tasks in the decorative arts.
- c) The middle classes were associated with governesses, teachers, art and the decorative arts and a minority with professions such as medicine. Many were involved in unpaid charitable work
- d) The upper classes were generally financially independent and as a whole did not need an occupation. The one "occupation" which was socially acceptable was that of an artist but often with an "amateur status" Some were well-rewarded financially for their works e.g. Lady Butler (Elizabeth Thompson) and her famous painting *Roll Call* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874 and subsequently purchased by Queen Victoria.

Why Art Was Acceptable to All Social Classes.

The one occupation linking all the classes, although in a varying degrees of status, ability and opportunity, was art, both decorative and fine. It is possible that these common strands were coincidental but they also owed something of their origins to how Victorian society perceived itself and the powerful philosophy of those who influenced the society. Gender studies always comment on the fact that this sphere of employment was an acceptable one for women of all classes yet very little discussion takes place on why this should be so. There is little doubt that this respectability was

linked to the patriarchal views expressed by men such as John Ruskin, one of the most influential writers and art critics of Victorian society. From his early youth, society had given credence to his views, particularly where art was concerned. Yet there was an element of confusion in his relationships and assessment of women artists of that time. His views on women were openly discussed in his work *"Sesame and Lilies"* first published in 1865 in which he said that young girls needed to be educated on an equal footing with men but that the ultimate aim of this education was different for men and women:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender... But the woman's power is for rule not for battle. - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision.¹⁸

On this basis his patronage and support for women artists was not for the development of their artistic career but to improve the quality of their relationships with men and in particular with their husbands. Lizzie Siddall was one such woman that Ruskin patronised.¹⁹ He gave financial support to her when she and Rossetti were experiencing monetary problems. The arrangement was she was to receive £150 per annum for all the work she produced in a year. Ruskin would keep what he wanted and any profits above the £150 for the remaining sales would go to Siddall.²⁰ Since at that stage she had never sold any of her work, she had nothing to lose. In no-way can she be considered or could have been considered someone who was worthy of patronage based on talent. Although she is now acknowledged as one of the Pre-Raphaelite women artists and her work was recently included in the 1998 exhibition of their work in Manchester and Birmingham, her work pales into insignificance when looked at in the context of some of the other women artists featured in the exhibition. Artists like Maria Spartali (1843-1898), Rebecca Solomon (1832-1886) Rosa Brett (1829-1882) and many others whose works show Lizzie Siddall's work to have been a weak shadow of that of Rossetti. In effect what Ruskin actually achieved by his patronage of women was contradictory; respectability for women to be involved in art at the same time denying that they had talent.²¹

Sometimes it is necessary to question whether Ruskin's patronage of the arts was derived from his admiration of the artist rather than the art. After a visit to the Rathbone family home at Greenbank in Liverpool, Ruskin subsequently wrote to Philip Rathbone from his home near Coniston in September 1878 to say he thought that Harold had some potential as an artist and would be happy to offer help and advice with his career.²² Ruskin's situation contrasts sharply with that of Philip Rathbone's in the context of a patron of the arts and an influential public figure. As a leading citizen of Liverpool Council and a member of the Museums and Art Galleries Committee he was in a powerful position to influence the art world. His influence was not just confined to Liverpool itself but in many ways was an international one. He was one of the leading figures behind the three Congresses held in Liverpool, Birmingham and Edinburgh in the 1880's at which he presented various papers on the necessity of art in society.²³ Many of the papers Rathbone wrote for these conferences and for Liverpool Committees show a genuine understanding of the nature of art education, the employment of artists and their relationship to industry and commerce. He even felt that "industry would be attracted to Liverpool by the presence there of art conscious workmen" and thereby easing the problem of unemployment.²⁴

His support for women and their involvement in art was genuine. There can be no greater acknowledgement of his recognition of the role women could play than in his appointment in 1893 of Henrietta Rae to the selection committee for the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition. The family affiliation to Quakerism and Unitarianism would be in itself a sufficient explanation for Philip and Harold's attitude towards women's employment. This may have been reinforced by their friendship with Barbara Bodichon with whom they socialised on their regular family holidays in Algiers, during the period she was resident there.²⁵ It is inconceivable that someone with views as powerful as Barbara Bodichon on the employment of women would not have influenced her visitors.

Employment in Art and the Census Returns.

A close examination of census returns for the year 1851 show that Liverpool had 168 painters, ranked 2nd to London, Manchester had 156, and ranked 3rd and Birmingham

also had 156. In 1861 Liverpool had 153 artists of whom 20 were female; Manchester had 181 of whom 40 were female and Birmingham had 145 of whom 39 were female.²⁶ By the year 1901 census returns showed that art and the decorative arts as occupations were increasing in large numbers. It is not possible to do a direct comparison with the 1851 Census because the numbers given in the returns for artists are given for the county of Lancashire and are not broken down into individual towns as in the earlier census returns. The overall number of males giving their occupation as either an artist or sculptor was 911 and as architects was 1226. The returns for females show that 197 gave their occupation as either an artist engraver or sculptor.²⁷ The returns that are available for Liverpool itself are an amalgamation of categories seven and eight, which included artists, architects, photographers, musicians and actors. Nevertheless these figures are revealing in that they emphasise the growing number of single women in the employment market. The Liverpool returns show that there were 1920 men and 1127 women (of whom 859 were single) in the combined seven and eight categories.²⁸ The county returns however were indicative of the growing number of women who considered themselves to be artists. These returns are however likely to be underestimates of the number of women actually involved or earning money from art and its related subjects. Married women were often referred to just as married women in the returns or legal documents no matter what their real occupation may have been. Marian de Caluwé was so described in the list of shareholders in the Della Robbia Pottery and Marble Company papers of 1904 and 1905 even though by this time she was one of the mainstays of the women artists at the Birkenhead Pottery.²⁹ As we have seen in an earlier chapter she was also trained as an artist and if anything was more entitled to be so described than her husband Emile who as already noted had “acquired” the profession of sculptor. Her death certificate gives her rank or occupation of that of widow of Emile de Caluwé sculptor.³⁰ During the same period Cassandra Walker was described as a “designer” in the Art School Registers but no occupation was given on her marriage certificate. Likewise Ruth Bare’s profession was left with a line drawn through on her marriage certificate of 1907 while that of her husband Otto Baier given as science student. Harold Rathbone’s death certificate was even more revealing in that his occupation was given as “retired artist” in brackets “painter”. Where a specific occupation is attributed to women in legal documents it is not

always easy to categorise whether they were employed in the trades or in the decorative arts. For example, the occupation of a needlewoman could be anyone working in the sweated dress shop industry to someone employed in May Morris's embroidery company. Kelly's Street Directory for Liverpool for 1900 listed a Miss M. Poole as sharing a studio in Colquitt Chambers with Cassandra and Marion Walker and Florence Cooban. The latter three were listed as artists and Miss Poole as a dressmaker.³¹ A trades dressmaker would normally have worked from home or in a small factory. The pottery trade is an even more difficult one to analyse since this was classified generally under the heading of earthenware production in the census returns. What is obvious, is that by the end of the century the opportunities and variation in employment in the decorative arts had increased far more dramatically than those in the fine arts had.

Distinctions Between Employment in the Fine Arts and the Decorative Arts.

Generally in this chapter, the discussion on some of the issues relating to opportunities for women to work has been under the joint heading of the fine arts and the decorative arts. Obviously the two situations were very different. The traditional interpretation has been used of the fine arts as sculpture and painting and the decorative arts as covering ceramics, furniture, metals, glass and embroidery. It is the fine arts branch that I wish to discuss first. Traditionally women painters and sculptors from the fifteenth century until the early years of the twentieth century were generally the wives, daughters or sisters of male artists. Part of the reasoning behind this was purely practical in that through male relationships they were able to access their art training more readily. The other reason was also practical in that this relationship facilitated the process of marketing the works the women produced. With very few exceptions most of the financially successful women artists of the nineteenth century were relatives of male artists. Women like Evelyn De Morgan, Elizabeth Thompson and Henrietta Ward. As Deborah Cherry has pointed out remarkably little is yet known about "the ways in which women artists negotiated sales, secured commissions or cultivated their clients."³² There was still a substantial differential in the way male and female artwork was priced but to analyse the reasons would take us back to Linda Nochlin and her theories on great women artists.

Whatever the reasons, having a male relative as an established artist probably made the sensitive process of price and sale negotiations easier. Opportunities to have a good art education may have increased dramatically by the end of the nineteenth century but there did not seem to be a corresponding increase in the numbers of women who were successfully making a living as fine artists and even less as sculptors.

A career in sculpture for women proved to be even more difficult than that of a painter. Few names spring to mind when considering women sculptors and those that do were not always British born. Harriet Hosmer (1830-1908) was born in the USA and Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899 although primarily known as a painter was also a sculptor) was born in France. Kathleen Scott (1878-1947) was born and educated in England but is more renowned for her marriage to Scott of the Antarctic than her sculpture. Pamela Gerish Nunn put forward various reasons why this branch of the fine arts proved more impenetrable for women. These were largely based on the need for patronage, physical strength and the resurrection of the demand for female nude sculpture at the end of the century.³³ The latter was still not considered a suitable subject matter for women. It is possible that the difficulties encountered by women in sculpture did not have their origins in true gender bias but were predominantly economic ones. Many of the successful female artists were financially protected by the male members of their families and could live within the vagaries of uncertain incomes that were part of being an artist. This protection was even more necessary with sculpture. Sculpture by its very nature is a much more expensive form of art to produce and requires even more financial support than painting. Phoebe McCleish (1878-1955), a student at the Liverpool Art Sheds, won a travelling scholarship to Italy and France to continue her art education but it was only after her marriage to a fellow student Harold Stabler in 1906 that she really began to specialise in her *forte*, sculpture. It was not even marriage itself (her husband was also an artist and lecturer in the decorative arts) that was the direct catalyst for more involvement in sculpture but the element of financial success that came from the pottery business that they had set up some years earlier.³⁴ Much of her sculptural work and that also of her husband,

are created in the Della Robbia style. This is not unexpected since the Stablers were very much part of the Liverpool art fraternity during the years that Rathbone's pottery was in production. Examples of their Della Robbia sculptural work can be still be seen like the Rugby School *Memorial* and the *Durban War Memorial* in South Africa. Many of Phoebe Stabler's small sculptural figures are also made in the Della Robbia tradition.

The opportunities for work in the decorative arts were considerably greater for both male and female than in the fine arts. One special firm in Victorian England, namely that of Morris, Marshall and Faulkner (and ultimately Morris and Company) encompassed all the productions of the decorative arts. They produced furniture, metalwork, decorative glass and stained glass, tapestries, embroideries, carpets, wallpapers, pottery and illustrated books. The one thing all these works had in common was the need for good design and the practical knowledge of production. Throughout history women have worked in the decorative arts, some have achieved fame like Maria Küsel who worked in her family's goldsmithing business in the 1670's and Anna Maria Garthwaite (1690-1763) who worked as a silk designer in Spitalfields. Nevertheless it was predominantly in the second half of the nineteenth century that women really came into prominence. There was no areas in the decorative arts that women were conspicuously absent from. Jessie King (1876-1949) was a designer of tiles, wallpaper and jewellery. Hannah Barlow (1871-1913) was one of the foremost designers and artists at the Royal Doulton Pottery and Mary Lowndes (1850-1935) was a stained glass designer. There were many others like Edith Dawson (jewellery), Phoebe Traquair (embroidery) and Julia Margaret Cameron (photography) who made careers for themselves in nearly all the branches of the decorative arts.

Work Opportunities in Liverpool.

So far in this chapter discussion of work opportunities for women have been confined to the general. The situation in Liverpool deserves a special study and for three reasons. The first is that the census returns for example in 1851 indicated that outside London, Liverpool had the highest number of adults listed as "artists". The second reason is that

art education in Liverpool from the evidence of the first chapter had unusually thriving institutions. The third and most important reason is that Liverpool had no apparent business or industry that relied on the need for artistic design and the question therefore arises what did the 400 students who annually attended the art schools in Liverpool do to earn their living. Importantly this question must be applied to both the male and female students.

As we know Liverpool was a port and commercial centre. Employment for the working classes was predominantly dependent on casual dock labour. We have also seen that the few industries that came into existence as a result of some imported goods like tobacco, sugar and rope generally only required unskilled and low paid labour. Two of the traditional occupations which had existed and required artistic and design skills, namely clock making and the Herculaneum Pottery had disappeared at the end of the eighteenth century. This situation was frequently acknowledged in various reports and articles that this was a problem for Liverpool. Trades listed in *Kelly's Directory of Liverpool* for the years 1900-1906 that involved art and design reveal a variety of occupations. These included portrait painters, miniature painters, furniture designers for the shipbuilding industry, wood carvers for the interiors in house building, wrought iron workers both for decorative and functional purposes, photographers, embroiders, tapestry and carpet makers. There were others but it is clear that all of these would be very small businesses employing perhaps 1-3 people. Tracing the subsequent careers of a few of the students who attended either the Art Sheds or the Mount Street School of Art may give some indication of how students were able to apply the skills they had acquired at the art schools. George William Harris a student at the Art Sheds worked as a theatrical designer in local theatres and eventually in London. Gordon Maxwell Lightfoot was one of the more interesting students in that he worked as a sign writer and lithographer and then went to the Slade School of Art. Lily Day who had been a student at Norwich School of Art and subsequently Liverpool went on to teach enamelling at the University Art Sheds as well as taking on private commissions in the early 1900s.³⁵ Herbert J. Morcomb featured in several articles in *The Studio* and as a student at the Liverpool School of Art had been particularly guided by John Finnie.³⁶ He originally worked as a sculptor

producing altar and other ecclesiastical pieces in the workshops of Messrs. Norbury and Paterson. By the early 1900s he was working as an assistant to Charles Allen, engaged in public monumental works. In 1907 he left England for California.³⁷ Katie Fisher was a talented student at Mount Street who gained assistance with her tuition fees, by doing some teaching at the art school. An article in *The Studio* about the School of Art had resulted in enquiries from a Viennese firm for designs in jewellery and enamelled work and she had been successful in selling her designs to the company.³⁸ She was also a good example of the multi-skilled ability of these students in that she also obtained a post with Armitages, a firm in Warrington, as a designer of tapestries.³⁹ The employment histories of the above students reinforce that there was no major outlet for their talents rather they were confined to employment in firms which perhaps had only one designer artist on the staff.

Employment in the Ceramics Industry.

The ceramics industry was one of the most important of all the industries where employment for women with artistic training was concerned. I have used the word industry deliberately even though it seems a contradiction where art is concerned. This is because the organisational structure, which existed for at least two centuries, was very complicated, slow to change and was factory based. There were many reasons for this. Ceramics was and is a combination of chemistry, to get the clay bodies and glazes exact, engineering, to produce the mechanical means of production and art to design and decorate the pieces. The result of this was the existence of large potbanks, some containing between 100-150 departments and the smallest using over 30 separate phases. This subdivision of production into numerous departments was necessary because the range of goods produced was extensive but there was a corresponding lack of mechanisation to carry out the diverse tasks. The tasks themselves required a wide range of individual skills and knowledge as in sculpture, printing, engraving, transferring and painting. A further complication was the existence of the culture of sub-employment, which existed well into the twentieth century, whereby certain sections of work were allocated to individual men to complete. These men were then responsible for recruiting and paying others to

complete the task. Inevitably the men organised the work so it was contained in their own family units and whole families worked for their father. The traditional structure of this industry, according to some historians, was orchestrated by a powerful patriarchal hierarchy.⁴⁰ It was also the reason given that the wage structures changed very little and in particular for women workers. There was fear amongst families that if women were given better paid work, then the men might lose their power to negotiate wage deals with consequences for the whole family. Some women did earn more than men did, in particular the skilled decorators doing gilding, transferring and painting but as Elizabeth Roberts emphasised aggregate wages do not show this.⁴¹ There is evidence that women did not oppose this patriarchal system too hard because no matter how much their personal position was improved, as a family there was nothing to be gained.

In terms of artistic opportunities, the prime work went to the very few men who were the modellers or designers of form. The routine decoration that was put on by hand, was the prerogative of young women and children. The training for this was given in the factory itself but the chance of obtaining this work was again dependent on the goodwill of the men in the factory. The wages and salary book for the Minton Pottery, even as late as 1893-94, gives a fascinating insight into the way that ceramic work was valued. The Director Thomas Minton was paid £1,000 per annum and Marc Louis Solon an outstandingly talented and valued painter, was paid £800 per annum. He was of course no ordinary painter, his speciality being *pâte sur pâte*. Moses Simpson the glaze warehouseman received an annual salary of £120 and Thomas Taylor a designer a salary of £119-2-6d.⁴² Even more revealing are the salaries paid nearly twenty years earlier before the Pottery Studio was destroyed by fire in 1875. These show that Léon Arnoux (1816-1902), the Art Director as well as a designer and chemist was receiving a salary of £1200 per annum with an additional bonus of £350. Anton Boullemier, an artist of some reputation received £400 per annum.⁴³

The introduction of the Schools of Design was partly responsible for the increased

opportunities for women artists in the ceramic industry in that training became available to the women which gave them the necessary skills to work in the decorating departments at the potteries. However it was the vision of John Sparkes which was really responsible for the introduction of studio potteries. As head of the Lambeth School of Design and through his involvement in the National Examinations, he was in a position to recognise the potential that both male and female students had in design. In the late 1850's John Sparkes approached Henry Doulton with the proposition that some of the students should be allowed to try their hand at potting. At that stage Doulton was ambivalent about the proposition but by 1867 he had established the Art Studio.⁴⁴ This link is one of the most important catalysts in furthering the careers of women as well as men. "Henry Doulton provided creative artists with the opportunity of expressing themselves in pottery and it is to his credit that he allowed their talents and eccentricities full flowering. There was never any attempt to impose a 'house' style on them"⁴⁵ Hannah Barlow (1851 -1913) was the first and most famous of over 200 women artists employed by the company by the 1880's.⁴⁶ Her father was a bank manager who owned a 250-acre farm and after his sudden death in 1866, she was forced to find the means to support herself. After training at the Lambeth school of Art she was taken on by Doulton's and like many women in the potteries, she continued with her art education at evening classes. She began her career at the Lambeth site but moved to Burslem when the factory relocated. From here she went on to become an artist of some repute. One of her works, a terracotta relief entitled *Our Pet*, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1881. She also exhibited watercolours at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. Hannah's career typified many of the aspects of women artists who successfully worked in the ceramics industry but it is atypical in the degree of the notoriety and success she achieved. The development of the new studio potteries was slow but they were given an added impetus (rather than originating) through the growth of William Morris' Art and Crafts Movement. This included potteries such as Pilkington's Lancastrian, Christopher Dresser's Linthorpe Pottery, Howson Taylor's Ruskin Pottery and Rathbone's Della Robbia Pottery.

So far in this chapter an attempt has been made to analyse several aspects of why women

needed to work. The types of work considered socially acceptable (which were determined by class structure) have been discussed, as have the divisions of the work classified under the fine or the decorative arts. The importance of the ceramics industry in the employment of female artists has been defined. Lastly the special economic and industrial circumstances in Liverpool and the lack of any major industry requiring art and design have been noted. Given that most of the industries in Liverpool and the surrounding areas only required perhaps one to three members of staff trained in the arts, the importance of the Della Robbia Pottery begins to take on a significance that at first sight seems inappropriate for its size. Over its twelve-year history it provided artistic employment for approximately one hundred people, many of whom worked there for all of that period.

Employment at the Della Robbia Pottery.

The structure of the Della Robbia Pottery conformed to the general structure of studio potteries. (See illustration 8 for a view of the interior of the pottery and the workers). Most of these (with the exception of Doulton and Minton) were run and owned by individual artist craftsmen. These men usually had independent financial means as in the cases of for example William De Morgan, Christopher Dresser and Howson Taylor. Harold Rathbone fits perfectly into the mould, a trained artist of independent financial means.⁴⁷ The company produced domestic as well as architectural pieces. Some of the technical staff at the Birkenhead Pottery had learned their trades in the Staffordshire potteries and they brought with them their technical expertise into the company. John Bowers, the senior potter is understood to have come from Doulton's. Apart from the technical and clerical staff the others were engaged in the artistic side of the production.

The designers as in all ceramic companies were the elite and at the Della Robbia they fell into two categories. The first was predominantly those who worked either on commission like Ellen Mary Rope or Robert Anning Bell or the well-established and famous artists who allowed their designs to be used as for example Edward Burne-Jones, Thomas Edward Colcutt and Ford Madox Brown. The second group were those who worked in a permanent capacity like Cassandra Walker, Ruth Bare, Marian de Caluwé, Alice Louise

Jones, Hannah Jones, Annie Jones, Aphra Peirce, John Fogo and Charles Collis. (See illustration 9 for a sketch of Charles Collis). The second group contained those who worked as both designers and painters. The Della Robbia was unusual in that the role of designer was interchangeable with that of painter. Working conditions also varied in that the apprentices were confined to regular hours as compared to the flexibility of hours that the designers worked to. One report in the *Studio* actually referred to the pottery as the "Birkenhead school under Mr. Harold Rathbone".⁴⁸ Harold Rathbone liked his project to be seen as being an educational establishment where artists would flourish under his tutelage. It is partly for this reason that he allowed his artists free access to his own studio that he had, round the corner from the pottery, in Hamilton Square.

Actual working conditions conformed in many ways to the standard of the day in that the men and women were separated and had their own work areas. This was to protect the morals and sensitivity of the young women.⁴⁹ The pottery was founded on the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement as promulgated by William Morris and John Ruskin. Individualism in creativity was therefore the underpinning ethos. In reality many of the studio potteries paid lip service to this philosophy and it was not born out in practice. This subject is one of great interest to historians of women's art and as such will be dealt with in another chapter.

The importance of the Della Robbia Pottery to a city like Liverpool and to its artistic community can be gauged fairly easily from surviving documentation. This documentation includes all the catalogues for the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibitions to which the pottery was a regular contributor. Art magazines like *The Studio*, *The Art Journal* and the *Magazine of Art* contained regular reports of all these exhibitions and any others at which the Della Robbia had a presence. The local Liverpool newspapers also carried references to the Birkenhead Pottery. An important modern documentation is the Catalogue of an Exhibition of the Della Robbia Pottery held by the Williamson Museum and Art Gallery in 1981. This exhibition contained the largest collection of known surviving works gathered from private collectors and from the other major National Museums. Included in the exhibition were some private family papers of the then known-surviving relatives of the

pottery workers. Through all these various documents it is possible to analyse the exact function of the pottery in the context of its artistic workers.

The most obvious benefit was that of regular employment in comparatively comfortable surroundings. Fred Miller writing in the *Art Journal* describes the working conditions in the Della Robbia Pottery, if with a somewhat romantic eye, thus:

The conditions under which these labourers work has been one of Mr. Rathbone's first considerations, and those who are acquainted with the environments that so often obtain in art work shops are painfully impressed with the undesirableness under which these workers live.....In place therefore of the racket and disturbances of machinery and mechanical appliances, we find in the Della Robbia Pottery the wheel being turned by the hand of a watchful boy, whose intelligence is constantly appealed to through the word or command of the "thrower" whose whole attention is directed to securing some subtlety of shape, some delicacy of line in the contour of the vessel which is being pulled by his thumb and fingers out of the clay on his wheel.⁵⁰

As far as one of the most hazardous risks of working in a pottery was concerned, that of exposure to lead glazes, Harold Rathbone did not convert to the use of lead free ones. There was a precedent for this as for example in Howson Taylor's Ruskin Pottery in Smethwick where only lead-free glazes were used. William Burton at the Pilkington's Lancastrian Pottery used to give milk to his workers to try and counteract the effects of the lead.⁵¹ Harold was obviously aware of the dangers of lead poisoning since he did not allow the workers to consume food inside the pottery because of the risks from the lead.

Gender issues were never a problem for the women but were perceived to be so by the men. Oral histories state that the women were given far more freedom in working hours than the men.⁵² This preferential treatment of the women is an aspect that was taken up by Richard Whipp in his research on the Staffordshire potteries. Whipp discusses the patriarchal perspective that feminist historians have emphasised as being the cause of the inequality in the factories and in particular the affect this had on the wage structures.

He says:

The orthodox feminist conclusions of Sarsby dwell on the disadvantaged position of women in the pottery industry. Great stress is placed on the differences between men and women in official wage rates and the division of labour.....Observation on potbanks in the 1890's confirms that women potters actively construed and shaped their work.⁵³

He went on to discuss how they construed and shaped their work as for example through age, experience, skill and work group loyalties. He concluded, "They cannot be portrayed simply as victims of a set of patriarchal relations which somehow determines their existence."⁵⁴ Whipp was writing about the experiences of women in the large Staffordshire factories but the experiences of the women at the Della Robbia Pottery would tend to give some support to his comments.

By far the most important benefit was to give both male and female workers the opportunity to cross the boundaries of the fine arts and the decorative arts. Earlier in the chapter I discussed some of the difficulties encountered by women in entering into the art of sculpture. The Della Robbia Pottery was unusual in the expertise it contained in sculpture. When the pottery opened in 1894 one of the co-founders, Conrad Dressler, was trained in sculpture. Dressler had studied at the Royal College of Art under Lanteri in the early 1880's and by the late 1880's he was a well-established sculptor with many prestigious commissions behind him. These included work for Christ Church and Magdalen Colleges in Oxford and two of the panels on St. George's Hall in Liverpool.⁵⁵ Due to philosophical, managerial and personality clashes Dressler left the pottery to set up his own business in Medmenham in Buckinghamshire. He continued to work in sculpture, the frieze on the Lever Building in Dublin being one of his best known works. After Dressler's departure Harold appointed another sculptor, Carlo Manzoni to take his place. So in reality although the pottery would normally be defined as a decorative arts establishment it was also producing a form of the fine arts in sculpture and in particular architectural sculpture. Originally this had been the focus of Harold's intention in setting up the pottery but he did not receive the expected commissions in this area of the work and the actual domestic production became the prime output. Despite this the company

did produce some good architectural sculpture. This was due to three main factors, the first being Harold's contacts with architects and the subsequent commissions from them. These architects included Edmund Ware, Thomas Collcutt and of course his own brother Edmund Rathbone. One of the company's most prestigious architectural productions designed by Thomas Collcutt was the fountain for the courtyard at the Savoy Hotel in London. This no longer exists but the Hotel does have some archive material relating to the fountain, more of which will be discussed in another chapter. The second reason for the quality of some of the Della Robbia sculpture was the commissioning of work from some of the high profile British sculptors. Foremost amongst these were Benjamin Creswick, Charles Allen, Robert Anning Bell and Mary Ellen Rope. The third reason for the quality is perhaps the most interesting and most relevant to this research and that is Harold had a source of very talented in house artists who were very capable of producing fine sculpture.

The most important of these was Cassandra Walker. Records as we know show that while employed at the pottery she continued her art studies at both the Art Sheds and the Liverpool School of Art. It was while at the latter she wrote to ask the Principal to ask if she could take the cast she had made for a fountain since she was leaving the school. The principal's response was contained in the following letter.

Dear Miss Walker,

In reply to your request to take the plaster cast of your wall fountain. I shall be pleased for you to have it. But as I understand it was cast with school materials I have to ask you to pay the school secretary 5 shillings for the same, after which the cast will be entirely at your disposal.

Yours sincerely
F Burridge Principal⁵⁶

There is no record of whether the fountain was purchased but this would have cost the equivalent of a quarter of a week's wages. Previous correspondence with the Art School, relating to Cassandra's Craft Scholarship indicated that finance was a major consideration for her. In response to her original request for one of the scholarship it was pointed out by the Principal that this might result in her losing some of her wages from her employment in order to fulfil the attendance regulations. To reinforce this there was a request from the

Art School to look at the terms of her employment. Unfortunately these were not recorded.⁵⁷ The regulations stipulated that it was mandatory for the holder to attend classes for at least two afternoons and two evenings per week. It was obvious from a later letter from the Principal warning her that failure to comply with these conditions would mean forfeiting the scholarship, that she was having difficulty in balancing her work commitments with those of the scholarship.⁵⁸ There are other letters from the Principal to Cassandra which, indicate that her attendance was an ongoing problem. On one occasion he even went to the evening class to see her only to find she was again absent.⁵⁹ Liverpool Education Committee were not unsympathetic to the plight of such students and as a result of Cassandra's difficulties they did change the regulations to accommodate those who were in jeopardy of losing their employment if they adhered strictly to the scholarship requirements.

Her interest in sculpture is reinforced in her earlier attempts to continue her education at the Westminster School of Art, which had produced some excellent sculptors including one of the lecturers at the Art Sheds Robert Anning Bell. A list of some of her work reinforces her aptitude for sculpture. She designed and made several fountains one of which was highlighted in the *Studio* (see illustration 10).⁶⁰ She exhibited another fountain at the Walker Art Gallery's Autumn Exhibition in 1905 and this was interestingly priced at £52-10-0, almost a year's wage for her. At a much earlier exhibition in 1898 initiated by the Liverpool Architectural Society she showed a decorative panel entitled *Pandora*, which was also highlighted in the *Studio*.⁶¹ She continued to make and exhibit architectural sculptural works throughout her period of her time spent at the Della Robbia Pottery and a fine example was her altar panel of Saint Catherine exhibited both in 1901 and 1902 at the Walker Gallery priced at £10-10-0.

Cassandra was not the only female artist with a talent for sculpture, Marian de Caluwé was another. There are no educational records, which would indicate that this was an area of interest for her even though Finnie awarded her the prize for best drawing from life while she was a student at the Liverpool School of Art. It would not be inaccurate to surmise that she acquired a considerable skill in this area through her husband's

monumental stone mason's business. When this business was amalgamated with the Della Robbia Pottery in 1900, the new catalogue stressed the availability of the religious statuary ware. Most of these were probably modelled by Marian. The statue of *Joan of Arc*, now in Glasgow Art Gallery, is attributed to her, as was the plaque of the *Madonna after Luca Della Robbia* also in Glasgow Art Gallery.

Ruth Bare demonstrates less interest in sculpture. The only known-recorded work in this medium was a clock case made in 1904. She did however, have a lifelong interest in furniture design. Charles Collis seems to have been more interested in painting, as were many of the other women who worked in the pottery. The evidence for this interest is contained in the various exhibition catalogues where their work was shown. These include painting by Violet Woodhouse, Annie Beaumont, Gwendoline Buckler and others. Marian de Caluwé, Cassandra Walker and Ruth Bare are listed in some of the same catalogues as exhibitors of paintings. This aspect of exhibiting is both important and intriguing since there was a conspicuous absence of the male employees at the pottery exhibiting alongside the women. The subject has therefore been allocated its own chapter.

Throughout this chapter reference has been made to the tension that existed between the fine arts and the decorative arts ever since the latter was relegated to secondary status from the sixteenth century onwards. In the year 2000 this tension has been academically resolved as reflected in the exhibitions of both the Royal Academy and the Tate Modern. Here though, there seems to be a confused merger between the designation of work as fine art but created from the philosophy, form and skills of the decorative artists. In the nineteenth century this separation continued to exist. The division was based on the perception of the decorative arts being associated with skills secondary to that of the painter or the sculptor. In addition in the nineteenth century the divide was also related to social class; fine arts for the upper classes and the decorative arts for the lower classes. The exception to this was the pastime of amateurs painting on blank ceramics. It was people like William Morris who tried to redress the balance but this was not an easy task since the decorative arts meant generally meant "trade" and working for wages, whereas artists work on commission. This essence of distinction also pointed to the dual function

of the decorative arts to the fine arts in the class structure. Part of this function was hinted at in an article in *The Englishwomen's Review*, on some of the difficulties faced by women even at the start of the twentieth century:

The Modern Art Worker speaking generally finds it difficult to earn a livelihood, and among the many causes that contribute to this state of things is the arrival of the dilettante in the money market. Women, one may fairly say, are more frequently to be blamed than men in this respect. That so many women should find pleasure in the practice of art is excellent, but that so many women of good private means should wish to sell their work must necessarily make life more strenuous for those who earn daily bread by their art.

There are, one need hardly say weighty arguments on the other side. We are told this keen competition raises the standard all round and that women artists of ample means are often most generous in helping poorer artists on account of their common interests.....But one must remember art rests on a different economic basis from other professions. The demand for teachers, doctors, accountants & etc. is continuous and increasing, whereas the demand for works of art is uncertain, swayed by fashion and the state of the money market. Pictures are considered luxuries not necessities, especially in our somewhat material age, and the supply being greater than the demand, the average worker must necessarily suffer from over competition.⁶²

This quote underpins the core of the argument in this thesis, in that much of what happened, in terms of work opportunities for women was economic. The same was also very true for men. Work in the decorative arts was the only way they could survive financially but the fine arts, being seen as superior art, were something to be aimed for. What the quote avoids is the gender issue. The position of men of no independent financial means was exactly the same as for women. The decorative arts provided them with a source of income. George Cundall R.A. came to Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian Pottery in 1907 straight from Ackworth School of Art. He came with the specific intention of earning money so he could fulfil his ambition to train at art school.⁶³

The closure of the Della Robbia factory in 1906 had catastrophic consequences for its art workers. Marian de Caluwé was by this date, nearly aged 60 years and a widow. Even by modern conventions she would be considered too old to start a new job. She had cashed in the 750 shares belonging to her husband, herself and her sister in the Della Robbia

Company (the value amounting to £750) in February 1905.⁶⁴ She struggled financially right up to the time of her own death in 1925.⁶⁵ Ruth Bare was already soon to marry Otto Baier, the head of the Liverpool Positivist's Church and probably left the pottery before her marriage. She did continue to work independently. Cassandra Walker was aged 31 years old at the closure of the pottery and single. Oral history indicated that she went to live abroad. This is now known to be correct. She left Liverpool in 1908 and the first known place of contact after that is at the YWCA in Vancouver in 1910. The probate records relating to her father administered in 1918, after his death, show that by this date Cassandra was married. How she survived between the years after leaving Liverpool and her marriage in Canada is a source of ongoing research. It is possible that she went to Philadelphia, which had a very strong Arts and Crafts Movement. This possibility is based on her close friendship with Ruth Bare whose family had lived in Philadelphia for seven years and may have had contacts there. Charles Collis left Liverpool to work at Doulton's in Burslem and subsequently in Swanlincote in Derbyshire. He recounts how he worked at approximately 14 factories always with the intention of trying to continue with his art education.⁶⁶ He found the struggle too great and gave up to become an illustrator and sign writer.

In trying to summarise the importance of the Della Robbia Pottery for employment to the artistic community in Liverpool, the last word should go to someone who knew about the pottery from personal experience. A report in *The Studio* by Harold Bloomfield Bare on the 1908 Clarion Guild of Handicraft Exhibition (held in Liverpool that year) pointed out that since the closure of the Della Robbia Pottery in 1906, there was no longer any obvious place of employment for those with artistic skills.⁶⁷

Illustration 9. Drawing of Charles Collis by Aphra Peirce, December 1900. Illustrated in *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906 Exhibition Catalogue* 1891.

Illustration 10. Design for a fountain by Cassandra Walker illustrated in *The Studio* 23 (1901): 276.

Notes Chapter Three

¹ Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (London: T. C Newby, 1848; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1994).

² Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (London: Heinemann, 1894; reprint, London: Merlin Press, 1990).

³ Florence Reason, "Art", in *Ladies at Work. Papers on Paid Employment for Ladies by Experts in Several Branches* (London: A. P. Innes and Company, 1893), 45-51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵ Some of the major works are Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*; Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth Century France and England*; Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1979).

⁶ The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science held various conferences in 1859, 1860, 1861 and 1864 in which the subject of work opportunities for middle class women was discussed. Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Raynor Parkes both gave papers on the subject, which were published in *The Englishwomen's Journal*. It was acknowledged that there needed to be more occupations other than art opened to middle class women because not all women had the talent to make their living from art. See for example Bessie Raynor Parkes, "The Market for Educated Female Labour," *The English Woman's Journal* 4 (1st November 1859): 145.

⁷ Ellen Clayton, *English Female Artists* (London: Tinsley, 1876); A. Fish, *Henrietta Rae (Mrs. Ernest Normand)* (London: Cassell, 1905).

⁸ Helen Postlethwaite, "Some Noted Women Artists," *Magazine of Art* 18 (November 1894): 21.

⁹ Jessie Macgregor writing in 1912 also complained of the same problem when she was a young art student in London. See Cherry, *Painting Women*, 57.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of census returns see Edward Higgs, "Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth Century Censuses," *History Workshop Journal* 23 (Spring 1987): 59-80.

¹¹ There are various articles in *The English Woman's Journal* 4 (November 1859 and February 1860) and *Transactions For the Promotion of Social Science* 1860 (pub.1861) on this subject.

¹² Amy Harrison, *Women's Industries in Liverpool* (London: Williams and Northgate for Liverpool University, 1904). Her remit was to examine the effects of the regulations and restrictions of the Factory Acts on the position of women and to include a general description of women's work. She visited 70 factories and workshops that between them employed 12-13,000 women. A summary of the wages earned by the women was given in the introduction of the report by Professor Gonner and ranged from 2/6d to 15/- per week.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶ City of Liverpool, Proceedings of the Education Committee, (26th November 1909-1910), 71-72. It was reported that Marion Walker had been appointed to Wavertree Technical School for two sessions per week, each session to be paid at the rate of 4/6d.

¹⁷ For a full history of the development of university education for women see, Pamela Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998) and Anne Keene, *The Role of the Principal of an Oxford Women's College 1879-1925*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 1998.

¹⁸ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, ed. Sybil Wragge (London: Dent, 1920), 110-111.

¹⁹ Her surname in Pre-Raphaelite literature is normally spelt with one L but the research by Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock raised her personality from a "sign of Pre-Raphaelitism" to that of a woman who existed before she was "discovered" by this group of artists. See Cherry and Pollock, "Woman as a Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall," *Art History*, 7 (2), (1984): 206-224.

²⁰Cherry, *Painting Women*, 99.

²¹See Pamela Gerrish Nunn, "Ruskin's Patronage of Women Artists," *Women's Art Journal* (Fall/Winter 1981/82): 8-13. The article emphasises Ruskin's assessment of gender being the bar to women becoming great artists but it does not discuss the question of respectability of the profession for women.

²²Family Papers of Joy Robinson, granddaughter of Philip Rathbone.

²³Philip H. Rathbone, *The Encouragement of Monumental Forms of Art, A Political Necessity of Civilisation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1889.) This paper was read at The Art Congress Edinburgh 1889. He also wrote a paper *The Object and Scope of An Art Professorship*, published in 1883 the year in which discussions were taking place about a new University Department of Architecture and the Applied Arts.

²⁴Quoted in a footnote by Edward Morris, "Philip Henry Rathbone and the Purchase of Contemporary Foreign Paintings for the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1871-1914," *Annual Report and Bulletin: Walker Art Gallery* 6 (1975-76): 66.

²⁵The diaries of both Jane Rathbone and her sister Alice Briggs recount the events in Algiers and cover events during the years 1858-1904. One account describes Harold dancing a Highland fling to the amazement of the native population. Alice Briggs, *Leaves from the Diary of A.S.B.* (Privately Printed, n.d.), 222. Alice does not date very accurately but this event was probably 1900.

²⁶John Seed, "Commerce and the Liberal Arts: The Political Economy of Art in Manchester 1775-1860," in *The Culture of Capital: Art and Power and the Nineteenth Century Middleclass*, eds. Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 45.

²⁷Parliamentary Papers, Volume CXIX, Accounts and Papers (1902), 531.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 562.

²⁹The shareholders of the Della Robbia Pottery and Marble Company are listed in the Company Records at the PRO at Kew.

³⁰Register of Births Marriages and Deaths.

³¹For a fascinating insight into dressmaking in Liverpool see Anthea Jarvis, *Liverpool Fashion Its Makers and Wearers. The Dressmaking Trade in Liverpool 1830-1940* (Liverpool: Merseyside County Museums), 1981.

³²Cherry, *Painting Women*, 97.

³³Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 217-218. For a full account of British Female sculptors see Susan Beattie, *The New Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). On page 247 Beattie includes in her list of sculptors Esther Moore whom she describes as having worked for the Della Robbia Pottery. I can find no record of her having done so.

³⁴See Leslie Hayward, *Poole Pottery: Carter and Company and Their Successes 1873-1995* (Shepton Beauchamp: R Dennis, 1998). In particular see the chapter on Harold and Phoebe Stabler.

³⁵*The Studio* 36 (1906): 251-2.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 169.

³⁷*The Studio*, 39 (1907): 67.

³⁸Minutes of the Directors of the Liverpool Institute, 18th May 1900.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 4th March 1898.

⁴⁰Jaqueline Sarsby is one example. See Sarsby, *Missuses and Mould Runners*, 15-26.

⁴¹Elizabeth Roberts, *Women's Work 1840-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

⁴²Wages Book for Minton Pottery, Minton Archives, Stoke-on-Trent.

⁴³Letter from Joan Jones, Curator of the Royal Doulton Museum, to the writer, 18th September 2000.

⁴⁴Mick Yewman, *The Lyle Price Guide to Doulton* (Galashiels: Lyle Publications, 1987), 13.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁶Wendy Kaplan, *The Encyclopaedia of the Arts and Crafts Movement: The International Art Movement 1850-1920* (London: Headline Books, 1989). On page 100 Kaplan describes Hannah Barlow as an untrained artist but this cannot be so. Perhaps the confusion arises in the definition of artist as in the fine arts, as opposed to artist in the decorative arts.

- ⁴⁷ The company was set up as a limited company and 5,000 £1 shares offered. These were not all taken up but those that were purchased by such notable connections of the Rathbone family such as the Duke of Westminster, the Earl of Derby, Ludwig Mond of ICI fame etc.
- ⁴⁸ Esther Wood, "The Home Arts and Industries Association," *The Studio* 26, (1902): 133.
- ⁴⁹ The autobiography written by Charles Shaw *When I was a Child*, describing the immorality he witnessed as a child working in a pottery in the 1840's, was not published until 1903.
- ⁵⁰ Fred Miller, "A History of Artistic Pottery in the British Isles: The Della Robbia and Medmenham Pottery" *Art Journal* (Supplement, 1902): 74.
- ⁵¹ Abraham Lomax, *Royal Lancastrian Pottery 1900-1938: Its Achievements and Its Makers* (Bolton: Lomax, 1957), 11.
- ⁵² See John Fogo File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Archives and the interviews given to David Hillhouse and Philip Mould in 1979.
- ⁵³ Richard Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London: Routledge, 1990), 203. The reference to Sarsby was Jacqueline Sarsby and her work *Missuses and Mould Runners*.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,
- ⁵⁵ For further discussion on Dressler see M. H. Spielmann, *British Sculpture and Sculptors of Today* (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1901), 85-88.
- ⁵⁶ Principal's Letter Books, 30th June 1908. A short time after this letter Cassandra emigrated.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 18th October 1905.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24th October 1906.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, June 7th 1906
- ⁶⁰ *The Studio* 23 (1901): 276, 279.
- ⁶¹ *The Studio* 13 (1898): 190.
- ⁶² J. Quigley, "Some Leading Women Painters and Craft Workers," *The Englishwomen's Review* 182 (July 15th 1909): 145-146.
- ⁶³ Lomax, *Royal Lancastrian Pottery 1900-1938: Its Achievements and Its Makers*, 119.
- ⁶⁴ Elizabeth Holt of the Liverpool shipping company probably bought Marian's shares since she acquired 750 shares on the same date that these were sold. Emile owned 748 shares, Marian 1 share and likewise her sister Ellen. List of Persons holding shares in the Della Robbia Company 14th May 1905, Records PRO Kew.
- ⁶⁵ Register of Birth Marriages and Deaths Her financial predicament was conveyed to me in one of my interviews with her great niece and nephew in the year 2000.
- ⁶⁶ *Liverpool Echo and Evening Express*, 13th March 1976.
- ⁶⁷ *The Studio* 44 (1908): 292.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Influences of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the Lives of the Artists at the Della Robbia Pottery

The rise and consolidation of the Arts and Crafts Movement coincided with the working lives of many of the employees at the Della Robbia Company. Traditionally the Movement is credited in some cases with having a significant effect on the artistic employment of women. In other cases it is considered to have had no real influence at all. It is therefore an area of research to be undertaken in the context of this thesis because without exception nearly all modern texts dutifully cite the Della Robbia Pottery, along with Ruskin Pottery, the lustre ware produced by William De Morgan and the Pilkington's Lancastrian Pottery as examples of Arts and Crafts potteries.¹ The attribution of the title "Arts and Crafts" to these ceramic producers is uniform. There is usually little discussion of the variation or interpretation in what "Arts and Crafts" meant in the context of the work produced by these companies. In many ways this is understandable because the protagonists and practitioners of the movement in the last quarter of the 19th century had differing perceptions themselves of what this meant. Pugin is credited with sowing the seeds of the idea of reuniting artist and craftsman, a major aim of the adherents.² Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin developed these seeds into the doctrines, which underpinned the movement but it is William Morris who is perceived as the "founding father". This attribution is no doubt based on his outstanding ability to interpret the ideology propounded by Carlyle and Ruskin and place it into a formalised code of practice for the workplace.³ The ideology was complicated and vulnerable to misinterpretation when it had to be balanced against economic necessity. It is very clear however that the debates surrounding the Arts and Crafts Movement are about interpretation of the philosophy and not about the style of the goods produced.

There were basic principles to be followed for artists belonging to the movement and as time went on these were adapted to suit the individual needs, often on economic grounds rather than artistic, which was in itself a denial of the principles. These principles were predominantly:

- 1) The work of art produced should be true to form.

- 2) Machines that resulted in mass production of goods should not be used.
- 3) The goods produced should not only be of the highest artistic standards but they should also be functional.
- 4) Historicism was acceptable where working conditions, style and the spirit of the age were taken from the past and the works produced were not mere reproductions.⁴
- 5) The individuality of the artist was to be sustained and not to be circumscribed by economic demands.

Of the three men responsible for the philosophy of the Movement, John Ruskin was the purist and his chapter "On the Nature of Gothic" in *The Stones of Venice* was the "bible" of the early followers. The description of the mediaeval stonemason, who derived happiness through the freedom to create what he saw in nature, epitomised the philosophy. It was preferable, for example, to have carving which was not perfect because it came from the labour of a man who was allowed dignity and happiness in his work rather than from a stonemason subjected to drudgery in order to produce perfection in line and form. In Ruskin's own time the work of the O'Shea brothers on the Natural History Museum in Oxford, a project in which Ruskin himself was very involved, was a perfect example of his theory relating to practice. His hatred of machinery and that of the devotees of the Arts and Craft Movement has been extensively documented, written about and discussed, as has been its correlation with Marxist theory on the division of labour and Capitalism.⁵ One of the lesser known pamphlets which was produced, was one by Conrad Dressler (1856-1940) which has significance for this thesis since Dressler was the co-founder with Harold Rathbone of the Della Robbia Pottery in 1893.⁶

The instigation of the foundation of the pottery is nearly always attributed primarily to Harold Rathbone rather than Conrad Dressler but there are facts that lead to questioning whether this attribution is totally valid. Dressler's known connection with Liverpool began in 1889 when he exhibited 25 works at the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition. In August 1893 he exhibited eight works again at the same gallery; crucially these works were catalogued in brackets as *Della Robbia Ware*.⁷ In that same year Dressler was already working in Liverpool with Stirling Lee on the panels of St. George's Hall, a project initiated by Harold's father Philip. The project was to complete the work on this

magnificent Liverpool building, which had been started in 1841 but never finished. The debate on Dressler's contribution is further complicated when the remarks made by Robert Prescott Walker in an article he wrote on Conrad Dressler are taken into account:

In 1893 Dressler would have appear to have been approached by Harold Rathbone.....with the idea of setting up a pottery to produce on a larger scale, the type of work Dressler had already been involved with. As to who approached whom with the seed of the idea is open to question, even though in an article in the *Pottery Gazette*, Dressler is noted as having been "the originator and moving mind of an enterprise recently established near Liverpool...."⁸

Walker goes on to emphasise that Dressler had already been producing wares in the Della Robbia style for a year, which he felt lent credence to the originator being Dressler rather than Rathbone. Fred Miller writing in *The Artist* gave another explanation of his involvement in the pottery:

How he came to add to his work as a sculptor that of a potter is soon told. Mr. Dressler was one of three sculptors commissioned to decorate St. George's Hall with bas-reliefs, and while working in Liverpool he was invited to give a lecture on some aspects of his art work.....The lecture he gave at Liverpool had one definite result, it awakened in the minds of some of his hearers the desire to do something for the art side of Liverpool life, and Mr. Dressler was asked to give his practical help in forwarding the object the committee that was formed had in view.⁹

Unfortunately Miller does not specify the title of the lecture. It is known that Dressler gave a reading of his paper *The Curse of Machinery* at the Liverpool Rotunda but this was not until November 1894, nearly a year after the Della Robbia Company had come into existence.¹⁰ Mary Seaton Watts, (the wife of George Frederick Watts the artist and a member of the ruling council of the Birkenhead pottery) adds to the debate when she recorded in her diary in August 1893, a visit she had made to Conrad Dressler's studio. She described how Dressler had discussed with her his plans for his new pottery in Birkenhead. He intended to start up a mediaeval style guild, a community of artists training apprentices to make ceramic decorations in the style of Luca Della Robbia.¹¹

In terms of experience it is important to note that Harold Rathbone had been trained as an artist and had no practical experience as a ceramist. As a sculptor Dressler was

particularly adept in the use of terra cotta and its application to architectural faience. Of the two men there can be no question that the experience necessary to run the artistic side of the pottery was primarily that of Conrad Dressler.¹² His exhibits at the Walker Art Gallery in 1893 catalogued as Della Robbia Ware prove he was already competent in that area of ceramic production. However Harold Rathbone did have money of his own and the list of shareholders is a testament to his wealthy family connections and money was necessary to set up the pottery.¹³

Harold Rathbone's commitment to Morris's philosophy meant that he had much in common with Dressler as demonstrated in Dressler's paper *The Curse of Machinery*. In the paper Dressler propounded many of Ruskin's views on the degrading consequences of the use of machinery for the worker. In particular he stressed how "the growth and spread of machinery had parted the artist from the people."¹⁴ He acknowledged, as also Ruskin had, that he himself used modern machinery to travel and to obtain food and clothing and that it did have the power to release men from drudgery but at the same time it had devastating consequences for both the physical and mental health of society.¹⁵

His views on the production of pottery are especially relevant to the way in which the Della Robbia Company was to function. In his paper he commented on the dull and monotonous wares which machinery produces:

In pottery this is particularly noticeable. Compare the old Persian pottery with Minton, Wedgwood and Sèvres latest output. In the former slight deviations add to the beauty, the results of appreciation can be seen in the sale prices at Christie's. Modern Sèvres produced by jiggers, lathes and transfer prints - no skill is needed. This gives no pleasure to the artist, he feels humiliated at being outstripped in production.¹⁶

Dressler went on in the paper to talk about the decline in apprenticeships and the great technical and theoretical schools taking their place. In his opinion fourteen to twenty-one hours in a workshop was far preferable to hours spent in college.¹⁷ There can be no question that initially Dressler's views were totally compatible with those of Harold Rathbone and that they formed the basis for the future running of the pottery. The reality of this philosophy in the harsh light of experience was to change for Dressler and lead to

his eventual departure from Birkenhead and the break-up of the partnership.¹⁸

There were strong influences to attract Harold to the style of Italian Renaissance maiolica ware. Most of these have been discussed in the *Introduction*; in particular Rathbone's admiration of the Arts and Crafts philosophy and of John Ruskin. Ruskin was both a family friend and a visitor to the Rathbone home at Greenbank, as were Harold and his sister to Ruskin's home Brantwood, on Lake Coniston. This house is now a museum dedicated to John Ruskin and contains an old photograph of one of his living rooms showing a Florentine Della Robbia plaque. This may have been one of the sources of inspiration to Harold since the plaque had been purchased late in 1879 or early 1880 and would have been in situ when he visited.¹⁹ Admiration for a genre of work however is not an adequate reason to want to set up a financial concern dedicated to emulating the same type of goods. It seems important to try to offer some further analysis of why someone trained as a fine artist and who was a regular exhibitor at the Grosvenor Galleries should choose to put all his creative energies into the applied arts.

Family diaries indicate that Harold was a favourite child of his mother, Jane, because of his sensitive and slightly eccentric nature. Reading between lines it is also very clear he was avid for success, praise and fame.²⁰ He was unlikely to achieve this as a painter and must have been aware of this. This assumption is made on the history of his paintings exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery during the years 1884, 1885, 1886, 1889 and 1890.²¹ Henry Blackburn published a series of annual commentaries on the exhibits at the Gallery.²² Each series included notes on over 300 paintings and never once did Harold's paintings merit a single mention. Harold's circle of contacts included many of the leading Pre-Raphaelites who were also involved in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Although Ford Madox Brown was never officially a member of the founding group of the Pre-Raphaelites he was nevertheless both a painter and designer of furniture for the group. As we know Harold became a student of Brown's when he was involved in painting the murals in Manchester Town Hall and came very much under his influence. Dante Gabriel Rossetti had also been a pupil of Ford Madox Brown many years earlier and the fact that Harold named his son Dante Gabriel is indicative of his obsession with this group of artists. One possible way to gain some standing in the artistic world might have been to

emulate the work of this group of men whom he admired and wanted to be part of. An additional factor was that Harold's younger brother Edmund Rathbone, an architect, was the Liverpool representative of the prestigious Century Guild, an *avant garde* organisation in the Arts and Crafts Movement.²³ The social circle in which Harold lived was dominated by these contacts and he, like his father Philip, seemed to thrive on it.

It is useful to analyse the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement, (as opposed to actual production styles), in the context of the Birkenhead pottery. This is in the context that both Dressler and Rathbone were strong adherents of the Movement and that the Della Robbia Pottery was perceived and continues to be so, as an indisputable example of the Movement. One of the most important tenets of the Movement was the attempt to move away from historicism in design, which resulted in mere reproduction. An admiration of all things mediaeval was an established fact amongst the leading followers of the Arts and Crafts and although they looked back to this period for inspiration in no way did they wish to merely reproduce or copy the designs of that bygone age. Rather they looked for the lifestyle of that bygone era, the comradeship of the mediaeval guilds, the training and apprenticeship encompassed in these guilds and the freedom to work away from the shadow of machinery. Such strong devotion to the past inevitably led to confusion in the creation of work, which was supposed to take its inspiration from the history, but not its design or form. Close examination of the writings of the adherents as for example in *Arts and Crafts Essays by Members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society* demonstrates how intertwined the theory and actual practice of the past was.²⁴ One of the essays entitled *Fictiles* by G.T. Robinson comments thus:

Some aspects of Ceramic Art are spoiled by e.g. the tendency to over decorate stoneware. Probably the wisest course to pursue at present would be to pay more attention to faiences decorated with simple glazes or with "slip" decoration and this especially in modelled work. A continuation of the aesthetic career of the Della Robbia family is yet an unfulfilled desideratum, not withstanding that glazed faiences have never since that time ceased to be made.²⁵

Two writers, Halsey Ricardo and William Lethaby, both referred to Bellini's painting of *St. Jerome in his Study* as the perfect example of how to furnish a room.²⁶ Certainly in much of the furniture designed by these early followers of Ruskin and Morris, the

historicism is very much in evidence. The simplicity of construction and design of the mediaeval joiner as opposed to the later English cabinetmaker is very much to the fore in their work. The crude construction and simply painted furniture of Ford Madox Brown would not have been amiss in the rural home of an English yeoman.²⁷ Stained glass is a good example of how the historicism worked well. The method of production was based on that of the medieval craftsmen thus replacing the poor quality glass, which had resulted from the quicker and cheaper methods used in the preceding two centuries. The subject matter of the designs for this glass was also based in historicism and in particular from stories of medieval chivalry. Examination of Arts and crafts glass and original medieval glass demonstrates that although the subject matter is often the same, the design of content is different. There are many examples to illustrate this from the work of Mary Lowndes and William Morris 's Company.²⁸ Embroidery and tapestry works are also areas in which inspiration was taken from the past and where for much of the work the same conclusion can be drawn as that for glass.²⁹

It is the application of historicism to the ceramic industry however that is more relevant to this research and whether it did depend heavily on reproduction of past works. The ceramic works of William de Morgan and Pilkington's Lancastrian Pottery owe their origins to early Persian Lustre Ware. This was first created in the sixth century by the Persians and continued to be refined further eventually culminating in the lustrewares of the Hispano-Moorish districts of Spain. Both Pilkington's and the De Morgan potteries produced ceramic wares that were similar in style and technique if somewhat different in design (but not always), to their ceramic ancestors. Howson Taylor's Ruskin Pottery relied heavily on glazes, which Taylor experimented with to produce the right colours and textures he wanted. Yet again Taylor was aiming to achieve glazes like the Chinese red flambé ware of the Khang-hsi period (1662 - 1762). Of all the Arts and Crafts potteries indisputably the work of the Martin Brothers owes least to the past and even to-day would stand alone in terms of creativity of style form and content. Governed by devotees of the Arts and Crafts Movement the Della Robbia Pottery inevitably owed much to the past. Initially it had been intended that the factory would aim to produce architectural faience ware, as had the Florentine family. When the anticipated markets for this were not forthcoming and the decorative hollowware that they also made seemed to do much

better, it was on this side of production that Birkenhead concentrated its efforts. Detailed examination of the architectural pieces will show that some were direct copies of the *quattrocento* Della Robbia. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point. The first is a white earthenware panel painted by Marianne de Caluwé and purchased by Glasgow Art Gallery in 1904. The title of the panel is *The Adoration*. It depicts the Infant Jesus being adored by the kneeling Virgin Mary her hands joined in prayer and over her head she is surrounded by cherubs (see illustration 11). The painting is in the traditional polychrome enamels of blue, green and yellow on white. The original design was by Andrea della Robbia (1435 - 1525) and a similar panel is housed in the *Cappella Brizi* of the *Chiesa Maggiore* at *La Verna* in Italy. Sometimes the palette at Birkenhead was restricted to the blue and white of the Florentine works as in the wall plaque *Pandora* decorated by Cassandra Walker in 1904 and now in the Birkenhead Town Hall. This piece was not a direct copy but has its origins in classical Greek art. Another example is that of a plaque by Conrad Dressler entitled *The Reaper* and produced before he left the pottery in 1895.³⁰ In 1861 the South Kensington Museum had acquired twelve Florentine Della Robbia roundels of enamelled terra cotta in blue yellow and black, depicting the labours of the months of the year. One of these roundels by Luca della Robbia called *The Reaper* shows a clean-shaven man with a sickle in his right hand, bending forward in right profile, reaping a field of wheat. Dressler's framed, oblong panel of *The Reaper* depicts a young female bending forward in right profile with a sickle in her right hand, reaping a field of wheat.³¹ Her stance is not as low as that of the young man but the drapery of her dress is similar.

Close examination of many of the pieces produced at the pottery will demonstrate the inspiration taken from Mediaeval, Renaissance, Arabic and Celtic art. A revival of interest in the Celtic and Arabic cultures had stimulated a fashion for the art they represented in the last quarter of the 19th century. Inspiration was to be found in the early Celtic manuscript the *Book of Kells* and the Arabic poetry of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. It is clear then that the Birkenhead Della Robbia Company upheld the tenet of "historicism" so beloved by the Arts and Crafts followers. To what extent "historicism" was a pseudonym for reproduction is not so clearly evident. There were many pieces which showed originality of design some outstandingly good and others of a very poor

design quality. I have not undertaken a detailed or comprehensive discussion of the actual designs in the context of the Arts and Crafts Style produced by the artists at the Della Robbia since Geoffrey Wilde in an essay for the Open University has dealt in detail with this subject.³² (See illustration 12 as an example of Arts and Crafts style).

An area not addressed directly by the followers of the Arts and Crafts Movement but indirectly implicit in their teaching and acknowledgement of an individual's merit and skill, is the position of women in the movement. By implication this acknowledgement of individual merit and skill should have applied equally to both the men and the women. Morris himself has a reputation for holding forward-looking views on the treatment of women but close inspection of his published works often shows that his approach was based partly on mediaeval chivalry - a man's duty to love and protect women. Publicly he was certainly an advocate of equality in property rights but in private his attitude is open to question. In 1887 his daughter May Morris took over the management of one of the most successful parts of his company, the embroidery business, yet she was never made a partner. An unpublished letter written to Bruce Glasier (24th April 1886) quoted by Penelope Fitzgerald further reinforces his private thoughts on the "woman" question:

....but you must never forget that childbearing makes women inferior to men, since a certain time of their lives they must be dependant on them. Of course we must claim absolute equality between women and men, as between other groups, but it would be a poor economy, setting women to do men's work (as unluckily they often do now) or vice-versa.³³

If logically the philosophy of the movement was to respect and acknowledge the skill of all artists and craftsmen then this had to include women. There are some outstanding examples of where this philosophy was a philosophy of theory and not of practice. The most sublime of all is the formation of the Art Workers Guild founded by some of the leading adherents of the Arts and Crafts Movement and to which women were denied totally any form of membership. Women did form their own guild in 1907 but the existence of professional gendered organisations did not always prove advantageous to women.³⁴

Another and very important belief of the Arts and Crafts Movement was that of the need

for both the artists and the craftsmen to have the opportunity to be responsible for the production of their work from conception to completion. This belief had its fundamental axis in their perception of the destructive nature of the division of labour. In Marxist theory it is the division of labour resulting from the use of machinery which makes the capital for the owners to acquire and the same machines used by the owners of the capital as weapons against the workers. This reduced skilled workers to mere machine minders. Many of the members of the Arts and Crafts organisations were committed to socialism and its inherent belief in Marxism. The Marxist approach was very important to them in the sense that this was a way that art could be involved in and play a major part in the changes needed to be made to achieve a more just and equitable society. Men like Walter Crane were genuinely committed to this approach. At the same time it was also recognised that the use of machinery, which resulted in the division of labour, had catastrophic results on the quality of the “art” it created and it was for this reason they were opposed to the division of labour. The contention was that the sole responsibility for a work of art should be the originator of the creation. In some areas of art this is not possible, as for example in architecture or in sculpture because of the building and casting processes. When this situation arises then the creation should be the result of co-operation, each member of the production being allowed to use their individual skill. Of all the tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement this is the one which could be manipulated most to individual interpretation. Certainly where William Morris himself was concerned he overcame some of these problems by teaching himself all the necessary skills as in weaving and dyeing. It was however as though he did not trust others. For example writing to Thomas Wardle in 1877 (An example quoted by Penny Fitzgerald) about the need to find a figure designer for high warp tapestries he says:

...he has no idea where to find such a man and thereto I feel that whatever I do, I must do chiefly with my own hands.....A cleverish women could do the greeneries, no doubt.³⁵

There are many examples of other well known artists like William De Morgan paying lip service to the creativity of the individual but both he and Morris adjusted their practice when commercial viability dictated the necessity for doing so. De Morgan provided templates of his own designs for the women paintresses at his pottery and Morris in

wallpaper production at his Merton Abbey Works. Bookbinding was also a superb example of the division of labour used to produce the end product.³⁶

Analysis of the philosophy of individual opportunity is one that has much to contribute towards this research. It is often cited as the reason why the opportunities for women to become professional artists increased dramatically at this time in history. Anthea Callen and Lynne Walker have debated the impact of the Arts and Crafts Movement on women's professional involvement in the arts. The former takes the stance that the Arts and Crafts Movement did not contribute towards this development, the latter explaining why it did. The two arguments appeared in two consecutive chapters of *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* emphasising the relevance and importance of this topic to women's history.³⁷ The experience of the women at the Della Robbia Pottery in Birkenhead in a company functioning according to Arts and Crafts beliefs seem to be an ideal case study to test out the two opposing views. In addition of all the decorative arts, ceramics can be considered to be one of the most suitable to apply all the tenets of the philosophy of the movement to. It was the perfect medium to allow conceptual creativity to be translated into reality by the same individual from start to finish. Historically it was one of the earliest art forms known to man and therefore it could adhere to the spirit and styles of a past age. Its production could conform to the rules; true materials (clays and glazes) and at the same time be both functional and decorative. The arguments used by Anthea Callen and Lynne Walker to support their cases should be examined in detail if they are to be tested out against the reality of the practice used in the application of the Arts and Crafts Movement at the Birkenhead Pottery.

Anthea Callen's argument was:

Although the Arts and Crafts Movement was in many ways socially and artistically radical, at the same time it in fact reproduced, perpetuated and thus reinforced dominant Victorian patriarchal ideology. It recreated in microcosm traditional divisions between male and female roles, which can be seen in the areas of design, production, craft skills, income and management.³⁸

Her chapter analyses why this was so. She divided the involvement of women in the Arts and Crafts Movement into four main categories. The first group was the agricultural

labouring-class of women who were involved in traditional rural crafts like the Langdale linen industry in the Lake District instigated by John Ruskin. Secondly there were the upper and aristocratic women involved philanthropically in the organisation of these rural crafts or artistic training of destitute women mainly in urban areas. An example of this is the Duchess of Sutherland and her Cripples' Training School. Thirdly there were the genteel but impoverished ladies forced to earn a living by waged art-work in an employer's workshop or as discrete out workers. The fourth category cited by Anthea Callen is "an elite inner circle of, most commonly educated middle-class women, often related by birth or marriage to key male figures within the vanguard of the movement"³⁹ This group could have included women like May Morris, Kate and Lucy Faulkner and Mary Watts.

Callen then went on to discuss some aspects of working conditions and prevailing social conventions which prevented women from advancing their opportunities. One of the most important of these was the social convention, which decreed only certain occupations were acceptable for middle-class women. Art-work was one of these. Yet this work she argues, even as paid work, only served to perpetuate the female role as "beautifiers, civilisers, orderers in the face of the social mobility and economic instability of a chaotic and threatening world."⁴⁰ This was because the "crafts" (the use of the word crafts was in itself a reinforcer of separate spheres because of the division of crafts and fine art) women were involved in were traditional women's work. This included embroidery, lace making and china painting. "China painting and book illustration evolved painlessly from the water colour sketching and drawing essential to the accomplished lady."⁴¹ Thus art -work reinforced the sexual division of labour and did not disrupt the patriarchal status quo.

Wages paid to women were seen as supplementary to their husband's income and according to Anthea Callen at no time in the nineteenth century were these wages adequate enough for women to support themselves. This was also true for women involved in the arts and crafts. To comply with social convention women often worked on a domiciliary basis. Women's role was in the home and therefore work even when paid if undertaken in the home, complied with convention. The argument used in this context is that this resulted in social isolation for many women and consequently this left them

unable to band together to form political organisations which could press for improved wages and conditions.

There are three other points, which Callen made to support the view that the Arts and Crafts Movement did not succeed for women, which I would like to mention briefly. One is that although training opportunities had opened up considerably for both sexes, training in areas like architecture, wrought iron work and design in pottery was restricted to the male population. Another is that the ideology underpinning the Arts and Crafts Movement, which sought to eliminate the split between designer and maker, failed in many ways.⁴² The example used was that of embroidery where the men like William Morris did the designing and the women of his household did the actual embroidery. Finally organisations like the Art Workers Guild were founded on the medieval ethos of brotherhood, comradeship and chivalry all factors which would exclude women from becoming members of the said organisations.

Anthea Callen acknowledges that there were some positive aspects of the Arts and Crafts Movement for women but the disadvantages heavily outweighed these. She concludes:

This failure [to institutionalise alternative patterns of male-female labour divisions] reinforced the sense of "otherness" experienced by craftswomen; it fuelled the conflict between gender and professional identities to which such women were subject and thereby reinforced Victorian social and work patterns, rather than offering any radical alternatives. So despite its positive aspects, the Arts and Craft Movement further alienated those women who were faced with the need to reconcile the opposing ideals of lady and work, woman and artist, private and public.⁴³

Lynne Walker starts her chapter with the following:

I want to argue that the extent to which the Arts and Craft Movement reinforced Victorian patriarchal ideology is less clear cut and rigid than was previously thought and that instead of further alienating women, the Arts and Crafts Movement provided women with alternative roles, institutions and structures which they then used as active agents in their own history.⁴⁴

To support her proposition Lynne Walker cites the following reasons. First the Movement provided opportunities for paid employment which often took place outside

the home and in the public sphere. Secondly women's art and craft design work led to financial and personal independence well beyond previous experience, enhancing women's position and status in society in a much more fundamental way than has been conceded. Thirdly it did not increase isolation and "otherness" as has been suggested.⁴⁵ Fourthly the Movement prepared the ground in the 1890's for the challenge to the dominant patriarchal status quo, which came with the Great War. Fifthly, the research work she undertook with Alan Crawford, which surveyed 360 arts and crafts groups that existed between the years 1880-1914, demonstrated that the workshop was the core venue where the basic activity was carried out. This applied to 273 out of the 360.⁴⁶ She continued that the large numbers of women in these workshops reflected "the fundamental exclusion of middle-class women from paid employment."⁴⁷ She did not argue against the actual sexual division of labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement but emphasised that it did give prominence to women in the feminine trades as for example Phoebe Traquair in bookbinding.

Further research work undertaken by Lynne Walker involved examination of three Arts and Crafts Society Exhibitions for the years 1888, 1896 and 1910. From this she was able to offer less subjective evidence for her stance on the position of the movement in relation to women. Three questions were dealt with in her research.

1. To what extent did women sell their work through the central body?
2. Did women's participation in the exhibitions increase or decrease during the period investigated?
3. Was there a sexual division of labour between male designer and female maker and was it broken down or maintained between this period?⁴⁸

The results are very interesting in the light of Anthea Callen's propositions. Lynne Walker found in the 1888 Exhibition as expected, there were less women exhibiting than men but there were a number of women designers there in their own right. By 1896 the position had changed somewhat but the women who did exhibit were predominantly in the crafts traditionally recognised as feminine. The 1896 Exhibition was also notorious in that the Macdonald sisters who had been students at the Glasgow School of Art were exhibitors.

Their work was famed for its individuality and originality of concept. The conclusion drawn from this exhibition was that art schools like Glasgow had imbued their students with Arts and Craft principles, providing women with the skills necessary to professionalise themselves. It was evident from this exhibition that there was an expanding arena of art-work and in consequence increased opportunities for wage earning. The 1910 Exhibition demonstrated that women's role had strengthened and in particular in new areas like jewellery, metalwork and stained glass.

The essay's overall conclusions were that the number of women participating in craft production increased dramatically during the years the movement flourished. By 1896 under the Arts and Crafts banner women's work had diversified from traditional feminine crafts to include a wide range of activities which were open to both sexes. By the end of the period there is strong evidence that the sexual division of labour between male designer and female maker had broken down within the Arts and Crafts Movement.⁴⁹

It is evident from this detailed account of the two sides of the debate that confusion and uncertainty still exist about the contribution made by the Movement to women and their artistic careers and professional development. They have both posed many questions about the reality of working in the crafts for women. How do the findings of Lynne Walker and Anthea Callen match up with the experiences of the female employees at the Della Robbia Pottery? Most of my evidence used to debate the issue is predicated on the use of oral history. This method was chosen in preference to using commentaries provided by contemporary art critics writing about the pottery in *The Studio* or *The Magazine of Art*. This was in order to alleviate the possibility of prejudicial interpretation by these writers who would not have been privy to the internal goings on at the pottery. The same argument applies to contemporary or modern feminist writers, whose interpretation of the situation starts from a different stance, that of a gender base, than the one I have taken. The oral histories come from some of the women and men who actually worked at the Della Robbia Pottery during the period 1894 -1906 some of whom were still alive even though in their late 80's and 90's when interviewed by various interested parties in the years between 1960 and 1970.⁵⁰

Working methods play a significant part in the arguments put forward by Lynne Walker and Anthea Callen and some detailed explanation is needed of those of the Birkenhead practices. The question of historicism has already been discussed earlier in the chapter but only in the context of design and not in the context of production methods. The name itself "Della Robbia" implied not only a certain style but also a certain method of creativity.⁵¹ There were many similarities between the fifteenth century and nineteenth century methods as well as differences. In both cases the basic material used was red earthenware clay (terracotta) which was either hand modelled or pushed into moulds. (This of course refers only to the architectural pieces since Luca della Robbia's production was limited to this. Harold Rathbone's pottery included hollow-ware, which was turned on the potter's wheel.) In the Renaissance ware the red clay was fired to the biscuit stage and then covered with the dry tin glaze. The tin glaze gave the wares their intense whiteness which when combined with the lead glaze gave the clear hard protective surface. Adding oxides to the lead glaze produced the colours, as for example cobalt oxide produces a blue glaze. In the case of the Birkenhead pottery a cheaper and less artistic method was used. The red clay having been first shaped, was dipped in a white slip (liquid clay) decorated then fired.⁵² This method produced a less intense whiteness. There were many stages in the process from concept to completion, all requiring different skills. Gertrude Russell listed these as:

1. The artist/designer was first allowed to draw the shape of the pot they wanted.
2. This was then given to the potter to shape on the wheel.
3. It was then treated as lightly as possible with the lathe to conform to non-machine interference.
4. The article was then dipped in the glaze (white slip).
5. It was then handed to the designer who would then work on it using the sgraffitto method.
7. It was then sent to be biscuit fired.
8. It was then sent to the painters to decorate.
9. It was finally dipped in the lead glaze and fired again.⁵³

For the purpose of argument it should be accepted that it was rare in the ceramic industry, including those studios of the Arts and Crafts Movement, for a single individual to have

sole responsibility for “conception to completion”. In this context Lynne Walker and Anthea Callen’s arguments are based on to what extent was the sexual division of labour circumscribed by gender expectations and rules. The key division in the ceramic industry is between that of the designer and that of the decorator and the question therefore is to what extent were these two roles circumscribed by gender. At Birkenhead attributions of designer and decorator do not support Anthea Callen’s argument that design was predominantly the male prerogative and decorating the female.⁵⁴ Fortunately one of Harold Rathbone’s rules at the pottery was a compulsory use of initials or monograms on the base of the works by both the designers and the decorators as evidence of their attribution. It is easy therefore to analysis some of the works of Cassandra Walker, Ruth Bare, Marian de Caluwé and Charles Collis. Analysis demonstrates that they were equally involved in the capacity of designers and decorators (see illustration 13 as an example of versatility). An important work made in 1898 was the *Mason Vase* produced to commemorate the visit of Princess Louise to the pottery. The vase was sixty-six centimetres high and marks confirm it was both designed and decorated by Cassandra Walker.⁵⁵ Some clock cases are of particular importance not only because of their distinctive art nouveau style but also because of the Positivist Church motto inscribed along the bases. These were designed by Ruth Bare and in one case also painted by her and in another by Alice Louise Jones. Marian de Caluwé was particularly adept in designing figures. These included St. Clare, Joan of Arc and Mary Magdalene. There are many more examples to show that the roles of designers and decorators were often interchanged at Birkenhead and that these were not dependent on gender. Further examination of attribution of the pottery produced will also demonstrate that although there was a hierarchical order in the pottery in terms of status, this was not based on gender nor on the type of work done. For example Harold Rathbone painted a tobacco jar designed by Charles Collis and Marian de Caluwé painted a panel *Fairies and Toadstools* designed by Ellen Mary Rope.

The experiences encountered at Birkenhead of course have to be put in the context that this was a very small company. According to Gertrude Russell there were never more than seven to eight decorators employed at any one time although many of these changed over the years. With the exception of the Royal Doulton Studio where upwards of two

hundred women were employed, smallness of numbers was the hallmark of these art potteries. Howson Taylor's Ruskin Pottery (1898-1933) never employed more than thirty members of staff. Many of those who worked at the pottery were related and the atmosphere is reputed to have been very much family orientated. Attribution of work at the Ruskin Pottery is difficult since no marks were used to identify individuals this being seen as unnecessary because decoration was predominantly glaze centred.⁵⁶ It is possible to say from oral history that the division of labour at the Ruskin Pottery was ordered to an extent by gender.⁵⁷ This division was however based on the degree of physical labour required for the task. The men were responsible for the heavy dirty work and the women for the lighter more artistic side. The one named designer was in fact a woman Anne Fletcher but she worked at the pottery at a later period 1910-1921.⁵⁸ From the 1870's there was a preponderance of female designers at the Doulton Studio Pottery who had trained at the local Lambeth School of Art. These artists initialled their work so attribution is straightforward. When the pottery was relocated to Burslem in Staffordshire in 1882 the women continued to be the mainstay of the studio pottery. This is not to say that there were no male designers. Men like George Tinworth (worked 1866-1913), Frank Butler (worked 1872-1911) and Arthur Barlow (worked only from 1871-78) were also renowned for the quality and creativity of their work. Yet it is the name of Hannah Barlow (worked 1871-1913) which springs to mind when Doulton Studio Pottery is written about or discussed.

Women's contribution was very important in design terms at the Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian Pottery (1893-1958) as evidenced in a recent exhibition of their work.⁵⁹ A pamphlet produced for the exhibition reinforces some of the themes taken up in this chapter:

Women have always played an important part in the pottery industry. Difficulties arise in attempting to examine what the nature of their part was. Inevitably one reaches the conclusion that the role of women has been deliberately concealed and their contribution devalued. Women tend not to be acknowledged in the official record. Instead we are given tantalising glimpses of their working presence in the pattern books and wage books which survive from many different factories. Designs are occasionally annotated "painted by women" with no further information given. Before the end of the nineteenth century the painters and designers known to us are men.⁶⁰

Research is ongoing by the members of the Pilkington's Society on the work of the female workers but the information so far gathered indicates that these females did have a role as designers as well as paintresses at the pottery. Some of the better known designers were Gwladys M. Rodgers who started work at the pottery in 1903, Annie Burton who commenced in 1908 and Dorothy Dacre who joined in 1900.⁶¹ This brief reference to other Arts and Crafts studio potteries reinforces the *status quo* of the Della Robbia Pottery in that the division between paintresses and designer was not gender determined. It also reinforces that only by continuing to investigate the history of these companies can the contribution by women be fully acknowledged.

All those contributing to the oral histories at the Birkenhead pottery agreed that there was considerable freedom for individuals to use their own designs. There were no rules, you were allowed to wander round the firm to pick up ideas (John Fogo) or artists were allowed to draw the shapes of the pots they wanted and give them to the potter to turn on his wheel (Gertrude Russell). Although there were no rules about design there were others relating to technique. For example the use of the green blue turquoise glaze was compulsory in the non-architectural pieces and is one of the distinguishing features of the pottery. Tube or slip lining was strictly forbidden. This method was one that Charles Collis was keen to implement, having been acquired by him when he had gone to work at the Doulton factory in about 1900. The use of a compass in design was also strictly forbidden although Charles Collis disobeyed this rule. There does seem to have been a genuine artistic freedom allowed to the workers, which was true for both the male and female workers. In fact there is evidence that the minor sexual division of labour in the Della Robbia Pottery seemed to enhance the careers of the women at the expense of the men. In this context Richard Whipp suggested that women workers at potteries used the "relationship of their every day lives" to enhance their own situation.⁶² The subsequent careers of John Fogo and Tom Hall are illustrations of where men lost out despite their talent; they were unable to sustain a living by their artistic abilities and left the pottery to find more economically viable employment.

Wages therefore were a very important aspect of pottery workers lives. Anthea Callen's proposition is that although work opportunities opened up for women these were often in

the domiciliary setting and thus isolated them. This had the effect of preventing them from forming organisations that would enable them to press for higher wages and at the same time reinforced the separate sphere argument. The application of these arguments to the situation of the women at Birkenhead is an interesting one. The type of production and the role of women as designers meant it was totally impractical for them to work from home. There seems to be only one recorded incident of this. Lena Peirce had plaques requiring decoration sent to her home when she was ill. On the plaques she portrayed scenes from memory based on her visits to Dublin Museum.⁶³ Everyone else worked in the main studio in Argyle Street, or in some isolated cases, at Harold's own studio in Hamilton Square. Anthea Callen argues that wages were not sufficient generally to provide an independent living wage. But if this was true for the women it was even more so for the men at the Della Robbia Pottery. To debate the question of wages from a non-subjective stance requires a detailed knowledge of average wages for both men and women and the cost of living during this period. This is not an easy task since what would have been considered an adequate living wage in certain circumstances may not have been the same for other circumstances. In 1906 it was calculated that a woman needed to earn a minimum of 14/6d to live independently and in meagre comfort and decency.⁶⁴ What meagre comfort and decency meant is not defined. All that it is possible to do therefore is to compare wages for different types of occupations and in particular for those involved in the decorative arts in Arts and Crafts Movement establishments.

There are two sources of information, which are pertinent to Liverpool. From the research work done by Amy Harrison on women's wages in Liverpool we know that wages in industry varied from 2/- for the very young unskilled workers to 15/- for skilled workers.⁶⁵ The other source of information comes from a book available in Birkenhead local library in 1898.⁶⁶ This book entitled *How Women May Earn a Living* written by Mercy Grogan in 1883 advised women on the opportunities for employment, the qualifications necessary and the relevant wage likely to be earned.⁶⁷ Her information was acquired by visiting manufactures in all the areas of employment she wrote about, which was very comprehensive. In the areas of employment related to art she advised would-be students on qualifications necessary for entry to the Schools of Design and the fees charged. Having acquired a training in art she goes on to list employment opportunities.

The reader is told there is a dearth of talented designers. The would be designer needs two years of art school and some months specialising in the chosen area of design (for example wallpaper or glass.) With these qualifications large companies would take on designers on a permanent basis at not less than £100 per annum.⁶⁸ She did emphasise that the companies were looking for talented designers since students often did the basic or repetitive work. With regard to china painting, good amateurs could send their work to Messers. Howell and James's annual exhibition where in 1882 £3000 worth of ladies work was sold.⁶⁹ She then commented that Doulton employed 120 ladies painting on china where the work was paid by the piece.⁷⁰ It has not been possible to establish exactly what wages were paid to women at Doulton because their vast archives are not currently catalogued.⁷¹ Another ceramic factory named by Grogan was Simpson and Company who employed large numbers of ladies for painting on tiles, glass, and enamels. The salaries at this company started at £40 per year. The hours of work were 9am to 6pm and one hours break for lunch was allowed. Two years training in drawing at art school was required for these posts. A interesting paragraph in Grogan's book described all the types of suitable work open to women, which included teachers, governesses, designers, wood carvers, engravers, photography, needlework, medical drawing, knitters and many more besides. Included in the list was the word emigration and the process was described in detail for middle class ladies who wanted to leave England to find work. This was a process later embarked on by Cassandra Walker.

There seems to be a consensus about the level of remuneration for artists in the ceramic industry, which averages out at approximately 19/- for a forty-hour week. Anthea Callen quotes 19/8d, which she acknowledges was above the average wage for skilled working class women.⁷² No wages books survive for the Della Robbia Pottery but according to comments made by Charles Collis his wage probably worked out at £1 per week. There is no way of discovering whether wages paid to women like Cassandra Walker or Marian de Caluwé were higher than this. They are unlikely to have been lower given the status they were credited with at the pottery. Wages books do however survive for Pilkington's Lancastrian Pottery and these correlate with the other studio potteries. Gladys Rogers started work in 1903 on 4/- per day; Annie Burton started in 1908 as a paintress on 5/- per week and Dorothy Dacre who joined in 1900, earned 7/6d per week⁷³ The wages

books do indicate the wide differential between designer and paintresses and beginners and experienced. Wages for women in this sphere of the arts are put into context when compared with other occupations. A highly skilled embroider could earn £1-8-0 per week, a clerk could earn anything from 10/- to 30/- per week and a newly trained nurse from £20 per annum. All of these wage variations have then to be put into the context of the 14/6d needed to sustain an independent female.

To return to Anthea Callen's arguments concerning the limitations prescribed by the Arts and Crafts Movement on the wage structure; there does not appear to be any substantial evidence to suggest that the Movement impeded the move towards better wages for women. The evidence seems to suggest that for the talented few the rewards could be great. For the majority of women who fell into the competent but average group, studio pottery provided employment in a comparatively protected environment. The crucial question of opportunity for earning a wage, which was capable of sustaining a living, is a more difficult one because of the complexity of individual circumstances and lack of detailed and precise information on wages of the more talented women. The important conclusion that can be drawn is that in many of the Arts and Crafts companies the wage differential for artists was not gender determined but determined on ability. There is enough evidence to point to women with outstanding talent to have been in the top earners. Many men who did not fall into this category fared no better than their female counterparts as evidenced by the history of some of the male employees at the Della Robbia Company. Overall the question of wages was influenced by basic economic theory, in particular that of supply and demand. Companies such as the Birkenhead Della Robbia could only be sustained financially if they were able to market the art-work they produced in sufficient quantity. They sadly went into liquidation in 1906 because of another basic economic theory, that of marginal utility.

One of the last arguments used by Callen and Walker in their debate concerning the contribution to the rise or decline of women's professionalism centred on the exclusion of women from the professional art societies. This exclusion was based on the ideology of mediaeval guilds and the male chivalry they encompassed. This chivalry functioned on male bonding and by its nature would automatically exclude women. The most important

question to this aspect of the Arts and Crafts Movement was, did this exclusion make any real difference on the careers of female artists? This question forms the core of the next chapter. As far as this chapter is concerned the experiences of the women artists at the Della Robbia Pottery (and those at Pilkingtons Lancastrian Pottery and the Royal Doulton Studio Pottery) do not support many of the arguments put forward by Anthea Callen on the effects of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the working lives of female artists. Rather they tend to lend credence to the views sustained by Lynne Walker. The caveat is that more research is needed on these small but important arts and crafts organisations.

Illustration 11. Della Robbia Panel circa 1900-1904 by Marian De Caluwé, Glasgow City Art Gallery. Design adapted from *The Adoration* by Andrea della Robbia circa 1480.

Illustration 12. Della Robbia vase designed by Cassandra Walker. In private ownership, photograph of courtesy of Pear Tree Antiques.

Illustration 13. Bookplate designed by Cassandra Walker for her brother William Walker. In private ownership.

Notes Chapter Four

¹For example Malcom Haslam, *Arts and Crafts* (London and Sydney: Macdonald Orbis, 1998), 111; Buckley, *Potters and Paintresses*, 88; Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 74.

²Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture; Set Forth in Two Lectures Delivered At St. Marie's Oscott* (London: John Weale, 1841).

³Thomas Carlyle wrote about the dehumanizing effects of machinery in his essay *Signs of the Times* published in 1829. John Ruskin wrote his famous work *The Stones of Venice* in 1853 in which the chapter entitled *The Nature of Gothic* enshrined his beliefs on work and the dignity of man. This work had such a profound effect it was published as a pamphlet frequently throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. William Morris took up the theme in a pamphlet called *The Aims of Art* originally published in 1887 later reprinted in *Signs of the Times* in 1905.

⁴I am aware that the use of the word "historicism" can be interpreted in many ways. I am using the word in the context that the philosophy or spirit of the age underpinned the actual methods of production as also the style but not the actual design itself. For a full discussion of the use of historicism in art and architecture and the stance I take see David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 104-111.

⁵There are numerous commentaries on Morris and his relationship to Marxist Theories: For example Chris Wrigley, "William Morris, Art and the Rise of the British Labour Movement," *The Historian* (Autumn 2000): 4 -10 and A. L. Morton, "The Dream of John Ball," in *William Morris Today*, The Institute of Contemporary Arts (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1984), 24-25.

⁶Additional information on Dressler's background is contained in a letter dated July 1993 to the writer from a very elderly surviving daughter, Mrs. Conrad Dressler-Blakemore, who was born after her father went to live in America.

⁷Robert Prescott Walker, "Conrad Dressler and the Medmenham Pottery," *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society*, 18 (1994): 51.

⁸*Ibid.* The reference to the article in the *Pottery Gazette* is February 1895: 122.

⁹Fred Miller, "A Sculptor Potter, Mr. Conrad Dressler," *The Artist*, (1900): 169.

¹⁰The Liverpool Ruskin Society published Dressler's paper in 1896. This had been read first in 1891 at the Quarto Club in London.

¹¹Mary Seaton Watts, *The Annals of an Artists Life George Frederick Watts Volume 1* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 45.

¹²Dressler's comments on his journey up to Liverpool and some of his experiences are preserved in letters he wrote to his friend the artist Reggie Hallward and are preserved in the Conrad Dressler Archives at the Walker Art Gallery Liverpool.

¹³Some of the names listed in the Della Robbia Company Records, at the PRO include those of the Earl of Derby, the Duke of Westminster, Ludwig Mond and Alfred Holt.

¹⁴Conrad Dressler, *The Curse of Machinery* (Liverpool: Liverpool Ruskin Society, 1896), 4.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸According to Hillhouse, (Hillhouse, *The Della Robbia Pottery*, Chapter 12 unpaginated) Dressler was involved in the pottery until 1897, according to Miller he left in 1895 (Miller, *A Sculptor Potter, Mr. Conrad Dressler*, 171.)

¹⁹I am grateful to Steve Wildman at the Ruskin Centre at Lancaster University who searched the records to find the information about the Della Robbia Plaque and its date of purchase. Ruskin's friend Charles Fairfax Murray purchased the plaque on Ruskin's behalf for 5,000 francs. It was sold at Sotheby's in 1931 and is now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

²⁰A report in the *Observer* of 4th August 1914 recounts how Harold claimed to the French police that he had the missing Mona Lisa or at least a copy. He suggested no one would know the difference if they replaced the missing one with the one he had! Another incident is recorded of Harold having an imaginary conversation with himself about how good his work was and did "they" really think he had under priced his work. Roderick Bisson, *The Sandon Studio Society and the Arts* (Liverpool: Parry Books for The

Sandon Studio Society, 1965), 67.

²¹ I also suspect he exhibited in 1881 under the name H S R Steward.

²² Henry Blackburn, *Academy Notes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1884-1890).

²³ Another cousin Frederick Rathbone was married to Kate Dixon whose brother Arthur Dixon was the President of the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft another organisation at the forefront of the movement.

²⁴ Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, *Arts and Crafts Essays by Members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society* (London: Rivington Percival and Co., 1893; reprint London: William Morris Society, Thoemes Press 1996).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66. The Della Robbia family referred to was that of Luca, Andrea and Giovanni who worked in Florence from 1430 to 1535. It is also interesting to note these essays were originally presented at the 1891 Arts and Crafts Exhibition again two years before the founding of the Birkenhead Pottery.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 281, 307.

²⁷ Examples of this furniture can be seen at Kelmscott Manor, Lechlade, William Morris's summer home.

²⁸ One of the best known works in stained glass is that of *St Cecilia* in Christ Church Cathedral Oxford, designed by Burne-Jones and produced by Morris's Company.

²⁹ The most mediaeval in concept are the series of *The Holy Grail Tapestries* designed by Burne Jones, which are normally on display at Birmingham City Art Gallery.

³⁰ The roundels can still be seen at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

³¹ This is to be found at the Birkenhead Central Library.

³² Geoffrey Wilde, *Arts and Crafts Style at the Della Robbia Pottery*, unpublished essay in requirement of the Open University Degree, 1975. Deposited at the Williamson Museum and Art Gallery Archives.

³³ Penny Fitzgerald, "Whatever is Unhappy is Immoral: William Morris and The Woman Question", in *William Morris Today*, by the Institute of Contemporary Arts (London: The Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1984), 137.

³⁴ This issue is discussed in the chapter on exhibitions.

³⁵ Fitzgerald, "Whatever is Unhappy is Immoral," 136.

³⁶ See T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, "Bookbinding", *Arts and Crafts Essays by Members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society*, (1893), reprint 1996, pp.134-148.

³⁷ Anthea Callen, "Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement," in *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, eds. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: The Women's Press, 1995), 151-164; Lynne Walker, "The Arts and Crafts Alternative", *ibid.*, 165-173.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 153-154. The quote Anthea Callen uses is taken from Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 99.

⁴¹ Callen, "Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement," 156. I feel that Callen's view of the skills and training necessary to become a paintress of quality ceramic wares is too simplistic. Technically painting on this medium is no easy task and more difficult than painting on paper or canvas because of the unpredictability of outcome due to chemical changes inherent in the use of enamels and glazes.

⁴² Walker, "The Arts and Crafts Alternative," 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴⁶ The research work referred to on page 166 was referenced as Alan Crawford, and Lynne Walker, Lynne, *Arts and Crafts Organisations*, a paper given at the Annual Conference of the Victorian Society, 1978.

⁴⁷ Walker, "The Arts and Crafts Alternative," 166.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 172

⁵⁰ The oral histories come from four workers interviewed. Alice Louisa Jones, (Mrs. Threfall) was interviewed by Helen Williams in March 1977 when aged 92; Gertrude Russell was interviewed in March 1972 when aged 87, also by Helen Williams. These interviews were published in an article by Helen Williams, "Recollections of the Della Robbia Pottery," in the *Northern Ceramic Newsletter* 29 (March

1978): 5-8. Gertrude Russell also gave a taped interview to H.H.G. Arthur in October 1970, the tape is missing from the Birkenhead library but some notes from the transcripts are in the Williamson Archives. John Fogo who died in 1980 was interviewed in 1979 by David Hillhouse and Philip Mould; the notes from the transcripts are in the John Fogo File, Williamson Art Gallery. Miss Helen Clark interviewed Charles Collis (1880-1967) and her unpublished essay in the Williamson Archives *Della Robbia* is based on these interviews. In addition hand-written notes by Charles Collis on his experiences of life at the pottery are in the Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery Archives. These workers although interviewed over several years by different interviewers were all consistent with each other except for some minor variations related to dates. For example Gertrude Russell when interviewed in 1972 said she was 14 when she joined the pottery in 1904 but in an earlier interview in 1970 said she joined in 1903. John Fogo said Harold had married a girl from the pottery and that there were no children of the marriage when in fact there were two, Dante and Lorna.

⁵¹Luca della Robbia (1399-1482) was born in Florence. Vasari in *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* written in 1550, credited Luca as the man who invented the process of covering bas-reliefs in terra cotta with thick stanniferous enamel or glaze which rendered them impervious to external climatic changes and thus eminently suitable for architectural pieces. The early works are usually white on a blue background and later, fruits and foliage were coloured in natural tints of yellow, green and purple. His nephew Andrea (1437) and his nephew's sons Giovanni, Luca, Ambrosio and Girolamo continued Luca's work. Vasari was not correct in attributing the discovery of the process to Luca della Robbia since this was a method known to have been invented by the Persians in the 9th century and transported through trade routes to North Africa to Southern Spain and to Italy via Majorca. In Europe it was known under the different names of Maiolica, Faience and Delft. Evidence that the use of this method was firmly established can be found in a treatise written in 1330 *Margarita Preciosa*. "Videmus, cum plumbum et stannum fuerunt calcinata et combusta quod post ad ignium congruum convertuntur in vitrum, sicut faciunt qui vitrificant vasa figuli." William Chaffers, *Marks and Monograms on European and Oriental Pottery and Porcelain* (London: William Reeves, 1965), 1:261. For further discussion on Florentine Della Robbia see G. Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters Sculptors and Architects* (London: Everyman's Library, 1980), 1:224-231; G. C. Gentilini, *Della Robbia* (Florence; Giunti, 1985); John Pope-Hennessy, *Luca Della Robbia* (London: Phaidon, 1980).

⁵²The Pre-Raphaelite artists used a similar method in that they painted directly onto the wet white background to obtain the intensity of colour.

⁵³Notes on the transcript of interviews, Gertrude Russell File Williamson Art Gallery Archives.

⁵⁴According to Gertrude Russell the potter incised his initials on the base and was supposed to put numbers, which he didn't always do and because nearly all the artists employed had been art students they were also expected to sign with either their initials or monograms.

⁵⁵This vase is now displayed in the new Wirral Museum, Birkenhead Town Hall.

⁵⁶See James H. Ruston, *Ruskin Pottery* (West Bromwich, West Midlands: Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, 1990).

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 33-37. Ruston lists the names of the workers and their positions in the pottery. Most of his information he stated was obtained via oral history. *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁹Pilkington's Lancastrian Pottery Society put on an exhibition in Bury, Lancashire, in the year 2000.

⁶⁰*Painted Women: Women Artists at the Royal Lancastrian Pottery* (Bury: Bury Art Gallery and Museum, 2000), 1.

⁶¹The most comprehensive history of the pottery is by A. Lomax, *Royal Lancastrian Pottery 1900-1938* (Bolton: A. Lomax, 1958). Inevitably this history concentrates on events and does not give any great emphasis on the role that women played in the company.

⁶²Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, 203. An example of this could be Harold sending Alice Louisa Jones to Llandudno for the day because she did not look very well.

⁶³Lena Peirce was the sister of another Della Robbia Artist, Aphra Peirce, who left the pottery to work at Doulton's. Lena died young.

⁶⁴Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, 79-80.

⁶⁵Harrison, *Women's Industries in Liverpool*, 45-50.

⁶⁶*Catalogue of the Central Lending Library* (Birkenhead: Birkenhead Public Library Authority, 1898).

⁶⁷Mercy Grogan, *How Women May Earn a Living* (London: Cassell and Company 1883).

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 59.

⁷¹Letter of explanation received by the writer from the historical information officer November 2000 in response to question concerning wages.

⁷²Callen, *Angel in the Studio*, 64-65.

⁷³Bury Art Gallery and Museum, *Painted Women: Women Artists*, 2-3.

CHAPTER FIVE

Exhibitions: To Show or Not to Show.

In the previous chapter of this thesis one of the points raised was the analysis of the Arts and Crafts Movement by Anthea Callen and its effect on the progress of women's professionalism in art. In particular the concept of "brotherhood" as promoted by the male adherents of the Arts and Crafts Movement was highlighted as an indirect cause of delaying female progress in the art world. "Brotherhood" in this context was defined and circumscribed by the mediaeval concept of chivalry, comradeship and protection. Callen cited this same "brotherhood" as a negative influence because it was the catalyst for the formation of many professional societies whose aims were to advance the arts by bringing together many like-minded people. One of the principal ways of advancing the profile of art and artists was for the members of these societies to put on exhibitions to display and sell their works. However implicit in the concept of "brotherhood" in these societies was the exclusion of "sisterhood". Deborah Cherry also follows a similar argument when she says "Sexual difference was managed in the societies of artists by the exclusion or special categorisation of women."¹ In practical terms this meant that women were denied the opportunity to exhibit at these high profile venues and thus denied the opportunity to raise their professional status and indirectly their earning capacity. This argument was reinforced by Pamela Gerrish Nunn in her work on women artists when she emphasised the importance of women being allowed to exhibit alongside men in the context of both earning their living and raising their professional standing.² Indirectly these exclusively male organisations were therefore an impediment to female progression. The outstanding question therefore is whether exclusion from these societies impacted totally in a negative way on women or whether there were any benefits to be gained from the phenomenon of exhibitions. In order to be able to draw any conclusions on this question, an analysis of the history and functions of exhibitions is necessary.

The history of both the development of art exhibitions and of professional art organisations has been extensively documented in art history.³ It is sufficient therefore only to mention briefly the background in the context of this chapter to

assist the reader. Prior to the 1750's there were no public art galleries in England and access to private collections was difficult.⁴ For the general public this meant very limited opportunities to view works of art. For artists it meant restricted opportunities to sell and display their work since the three main outlets for sales were either auctions, art dealers (who could and did exert considerable control of the market) and private patronage. As a result there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the status quo. The realisation that the public display of artists' works to potential purchasers in the exhibition setting originated from the successful showing in 1747 of paintings donated to the Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital.⁵ At the same time it was also recognised that there was a need to formalise the informal groups of artists who met to arrange these exhibitions and hence the growth of art societies.

Over the next century a plethora of societies were founded, societies like the Royal Academy in 1768, the Royal Society of British Artists in 1823 and the New English Art Club 1886. The Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours was established in 1805 but in 1850 this organisation angered many women artists when it ejected them from full membership and relegated them to associate membership only. Women reacted by forming their own society in 1856, the Society of Female Artists, renamed in 1899, the Society of Women Artists. These organisations were predominantly for the promulgation of the fine arts and not the decorative arts. However in the later part of the nineteenth century the high profile of the Arts and Crafts Movement led to a numerous societies being formed specifically for the promotion of the decorative arts. This period saw the introduction of the Royal Society of Painters, Engravers and Etchers, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and many others besides. Most of these national organisations usually had their headquarters in London but many provincial cities like Liverpool and Manchester had their own well-organised branches. Harold Rathbone's brother Edmund, an architect, who had been in partnership with Mackmurdo, was the Liverpool representative of the Century Guild, which had a stand at the International Exhibition held in Liverpool in 1886.⁶

As previously noted, membership of these societies brought with them an often-automatic right to enter works in the exhibitions that were held under their auspices.

Some of these exhibitions allowed non-members, including women, to submit approved works as in the case of the Royal Academy. Normally women's works were relegated to the less important and less conspicuous parts of the galleries. Other organisations employed different methods of choosing which works of art would be exhibited. The Grosvenor Gallery was one such body.⁷ Only invited exhibitors were allowed to send works and there was no precedent for personal requests to exhibit.⁸ It is very clear when looking at the names of the invited artists that there was a mixture of professionals as well as amateurs. Sir Edward Burne-Jones, for example, in 1877 exhibited *The Days of Creation*, which was used as a design for one of the most successful series of Della Robbia pottery plaques.⁹ Henry Scott Tuke exhibited a portrait of *Miss Charlie Gem*, Marian de Caluwé's cousin in 1886.¹⁰ Harold Rathbone exhibited for several years during the period 1884-1890.¹¹ One of the amateur artists to exhibit two watercolours in 1877 was the Countess of Warwick.¹² There did appear to be a comparatively high proportion of titled ladies who exhibited at the gallery but with rare exceptions their works were hardly ever hung in the west or east galleries, the most prestigious locations. It is also clear that there was an element of using social connections in order to be invited to exhibit at the Grosvenor. Indeed Charles Hallé in his memoirs recorded that he dreaded the few months prior to the exhibitions because of the frequency he would be taken aside by proud mothers at dinner parties who wanted to tell him about their artistically talented daughters.¹³ Some organisations had open exhibitions where any one could send works provided they conformed to an accepted standard and Liverpool was to the forefront in holding such exhibitions. In addition to professional art bodies and private art galleries, larger and more commercial exhibitions took place such as the great Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 and the St. Louis Exhibition of 1904. Trade and industry were the prime exhibits in these events but respectability was acquired by the presence of a Fine Art Section.

No matter what category the exhibitions fell into, whether they were international, national or provincial, they existed for specific functions, often dependent on their instigators. In order to assess any impact that exhibition opportunities may have had on women's art careers, these functions need to be put in the context of the

experiences of the women who did exhibit during the latter part of the nineteenth and earlier part of the twentieth centuries. Harold Rathbone was prolific in the opportunities he took to exhibit the Della Robbia pottery and the company therefore provides a valuable case study to examine the effects of exhibiting on women artists' professional development and careers. If the women working at the Birkenhead pottery only exhibited under the auspices of the company and not in their own right and also only in the field of the decorative arts then the Company would be an invalid case study. There is evidence to show that this was not the situation.¹⁴

An analysis of the functions of exhibitions seems to indicate that these were wide-ranging and beneficial in some respects for the whole spectrum of society, from government institutions to the lone amateur craft worker. Although the interests of the large state exhibitions frequently contained elements of nationalistic or imperialistic propaganda, there were also opportunities for the smaller companies and individuals to be represented. Thus at the 1908 *Franco-British Exhibition* Pilkingtons' Lancastrian Pottery had a stand and in a report of the exhibition, a whole chapter was dedicated to their ceramic exhibits.¹⁵ Recognition of individuals was also possible at these state events. At the same *Franco-British Exhibition* Conrad Dressler, who by now had left the Della Robbia Pottery, exhibited in the sculpture section a work entitled *Bacchante*.¹⁶ Another artist with Della Robbia associations whose work was also shown at the same exhibition was Charles Allen. His work *Rescued* was highly praised but the question was asked why did his artistic standing not receive the recognition it deserved? The writer answered the question himself by pointing out it was because of Allen's commitment and priority to teaching in Liverpool.¹⁷ So there were advantages to be gained for individuals even at the largest of exhibitions.

These types of large and prolonged events incurred high costs and relied on heavy financial input from the state. The 1873 Vienna and the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibitions both made losses which were covered by government.¹⁸ The Great Exhibition of 1851 held in London was unusual in that it did make a healthy profit, the proceeds then being used to set up the South Kensington Schools of Art.

The propaganda element in these large state exhibitions did not benefit women art students directly but indirectly the profits made from the 1851 Exhibition did. Prior to 1851 art education, as we know, had been difficult for women to access. The setting up of the South Kensington Schools of design opened up new opportunities for women, particularly from the middle classes and in the field of both the fine and the decorative arts. The Government Schools of Design had their vociferous critics but they were the first step for many women in the 1850's.

There were many educational advantages to be gained from exhibitions whether intentional or unintentional. The experience of being able to gather such large numbers of people together in one place (the 1851 Exhibition in London had over six million visitors and the 1901 Glasgow Exhibition over eleven million) over an average length of six months was a unique opportunity to educate. This was not confined to information on the exhibits themselves but opened up the whole area of educational opportunities. After the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, it was recorded that the numbers of young men applying to art schools and similar institutions increased dramatically, as did the numbers of young American artists leaving to train in Paris.¹⁹ This new interest in art led to an increase in the establishment of new schools and related art societies. Paul Greenhalgh pointed out in his work on exhibitions that one of the major effects of international exhibitions could be seen in the growth of art institutions like museums and art bodies, into huge organisations.²⁰

Another aspect of education but on much smaller scale was the student exhibitions put on by the art schools themselves. These made valuable contributions both in the recruitment of new students and towards the future career prospects of the same students. Frank Burridge writing in the *Studio* in 1894 made the following comment on the National Art Training Schools Sketching Club Exhibition:

We go there expecting to find a series of antiquated and laboriously stippled productions – the only kind of work which can be produced in the schools according to a certain class of critics, unwise with the ignorance of a bygone generation. When we see, on the contrary a collection of paintings and drawings, of which the prevailing characteristics are their modernity and

their diversity from each other, we are pleasantly impressed with a kind of shock.²¹

This kind of comment could not do anything but enhance the reputation of art schools. The Walker Art Gallery held regular annual exhibitions of the work of the students from the Liverpool School of Art and the Art Sheds. Reports on their exhibits appeared in art magazines as for example in *The Studio*. Harold Bloomfield Bare wrote in 1898, "The opportunity afforded by this exhibition of reviewing the lines of progress made by the various local art schools and of comparing the students' work is an interesting one."²² He went on to discuss the quality of the work of both schools naming individual artists as in the case of Miss M. Pollexfen who later worked with Cassandra Walker on a Della Robbia panel exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery in 1898.²³ Another report in *The Studio* again commented on the display of students' work at the 1901 exhibition, which was opened by the Lord Mayor. In this case twenty-five individual pieces were mentioned; twelve by men and thirteen by women including pieces by Cassandra Walker and Ruth Bare.²⁴ The message conveyed by the art critics to would-be art students and potential buyers had to be one of appreciation of the quality of work produced in these schools and most interestingly that there was no gender bias in assessment of the work produced. The right to exhibit at the Walker Art Gallery was not confined to only those working in the fine arts but also to those in the decorative arts particularly those working in the field of ceramics, furniture and jewellery. This reinforced the new status and opportunity to be found in the decorative arts.

Opportunities to view the great works of art were also an intrinsic part of any art students training. Loan exhibitions and major exhibitions of the works of the great artists and also of modern artists gave students the chance to see work that they might not otherwise see particularly if this meant travelling to London. This experience of education can also be seen at the very local level even in the early days of exhibitions. The Autumn Exhibitions held at the Walker Art Gallery attracted all the great names of the period. There is a complete set of the catalogues for these exhibitions still in existence and there is no name of any significance missing from the catalogues.²⁵ Just to give a few of the names denotes the quality of the exhibits, names such as Holman Hunt, Evelyn De Morgan, Maria Spartali, Alma

Tadema, James Whistler, Giovanni Segantini, Edward Burne-Jones, Lady Elizabeth Butler and Louise Jopling. Private galleries in Liverpool also put on exhibitions of modern works, which were open to the art students. Agnew and Sons who had a gallery in Dale Street in the centre of Liverpool put on an exhibition in 1890 titled *The Briar Rose* of pictures painted by Edward Burne Jones. In 1893 a display of Whistler's Venice etchings and defaced plates were on view for the Liverpool public at Robert Dunthorne's Gallery.²⁶ The dates of these exhibitions coincide with the dates that many of the artists at the Della Robbia Pottery were also studying either at the Liverpool School of Art or the Art Sheds.

The educational emphasis in exhibitions was therefore an important constituent in highlighting the availability for non-gendered opportunities in art education. The female presence at the exhibitions also clearly allowed women to be positioned in the public eye helping to destroy some of the perceptions that women belonged to the domestic sphere. This was achieved by the female students displaying their work alongside their male colleagues in areas of practice normally associated with the male artists. A report on the Liverpool students' exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery in 1898 comments on the work of four students in the new brass and copper class instructed by Richard L. Rathbone. Three of the students were male and one female, M. Pollexfen being the female.²⁷ May Isabel Pollexfen was described as a wood carver in the student registers of the Art Sheds for the 1901-2 session and as previously noted worked in conjunction with Cassandra Walker.²⁸ In another account of the exhibition of students' work entered for the 1899 National Competition, a design for a portable bookcase by Lily Day was highlighted as "one of the most original conceptions in table furniture."²⁹ This was a view reinforced by the sculptor Esther Wood in her report in *The Studio* on the exhibition of the work entered in the National Competitions of 1900. She said "that some of the best work in the larger kinds of decorative design should come from the women students is no longer a matter of surprise."³⁰

The importance of the educational element in exhibitions for art organisations can be summarised as helping to stimulate the building of educational establishments, as opening up entrance to the academic institutions and giving publicity to the work of

students in the educational establishments. The latter can be seen very clearly as applicable to the Liverpool art students and women from the Della Robbia Pottery. A minor aspect of the Liverpool exhibitions was in stimulating interest in art at an early age. Liverpool Corporation, for example in 1872 staged an Art Exhibition which was visited by nearly 23,000 visitors who paid to see works of art which were on sale but most importantly approximately 10,000 school children visited the exhibition free of charge.³¹

The promotion of trade and industry at large international exhibitions is not an aim that initially would be considered important to small studio potteries and even less so to the promotion of the professional development of women. Involvement in this type of exhibition highlights several issues that on closer scrutiny reveal that they were not only relevant but also crucial to the female workforce. There was one exhibition in this category, which is especially relevant in this context and in the context of the Della Robbia Company. This was the 1902 Cork International Exhibition. (See illustration 14).

The Cork International Exhibition had its origins in two previously successful exhibitions, one in 1852 and the other in 1883. A decision was made to host another one in 1902, driven by the enthusiasm of Alderman Edward Fitzgerald, Lord Mayor of Cork. It took almost sixteen months to co-ordinate during which temporary buildings and galleries were erected to house the agricultural and industrial exhibits. "There were pavilions, tea rooms, restaurants and ornamental gardens where people socialised and passed away the hours."³² This exhibition opened on the May 1st 1902 and closed in November 1902. So successful was it that the decision was made to reopen it for a further three months in August 1903. By then almost two million people had passed through its turnstiles. The daily reports in the *Cork Examiner* reflected the entertaining and fun aura of the exhibition, even going so far as to request people not to use the ornamental shrubs to hang out washing to dry since it lowered the tone.³³ Yet there was a very serious undercurrent to Alderman Fitzgerald's inauguration of the exhibition. Ireland was a country of limited industry and employment opportunities and as a result many of its young people were emigrating to find work in America and elsewhere. The exhibition was held under

the auspices of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, the idea being to encourage existing industries and to promote possible new ones by looking at Ireland's natural resources. There was to be series of working exhibits using these natural resources and one of the most obvious of these was the Irish clays.³⁴ The Della Robbia Pottery was to provide one of these working exhibitions to demonstrate the possibility of setting up local potteries.

It is not clear how Harold Rathbone came to be involved in this venture since there is no surviving documentation in the company archives. We do have some insight into the venture from his mother's diary in which she recorded:

Harold has obtained an appointment at Cork for a working exhibition of his pottery and has gone with his wife and little Lorna. They seem to be getting on well. The Duke of Connaught paid a visit to the exhibition. He was going round in a rather listless way and Harold said to him "For goodness sake look as though you were a little interested in things". The Duke only laughed and pulled himself together and began to look first one side then the other.³⁵

She gave no explanation about the choice of Cork. One possibility is that Harold could have been invited as a result of his connections with the Walker Art Gallery which along with the galleries of Manchester, Glasgow, Preston and Southport loaned paintings to the Fine Art section of the exhibition.³⁶ Several pottery companies installed in the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction's Pavilion were using local Irish clays to provide working exhibits. Various reports appeared in the *Cork Examiner* about a firm called Hughes and Company and its use of Rostellan clay. The reports emphasised its popularity and good sales but so far I have been only able to find one reference in the Irish newspaper about the Della Robbia Pottery. This was in a report about the visit by the Irish Trade Union Congress to the Industrial Hall where the potteries were situated. The writer went on to say it was not possible to give detailed accounts of the potteries like Della Robbia but would do so in the future.³⁷

One of the positive outcomes for the Birkenhead pottery was the opportunity to use one of the local clays known as Boyle's Clay, which was very suitable for terracotta work. It created fewer problems in the firing and consequently some connoisseurs

have judged the work produced at Cork as some of the company's best. In terms of highlighting the pottery industry in Ireland the exhibition can be seen as very successful but probably it did not have the same effect in England. The Della Robbia's contribution was reported in the *Liverpool Evening Echo* but there did not appear to be any national coverage of the exhibition.³⁸ Generally the *Cork Examiner* complained about the lack of advertising in England and the failure of the train and steamship companies to provide inclusive travel and entrance tickets to the event. Harold's mother Jane, while on holiday in Llandudno decided she would travel to Holyhead to cross over to see the exhibition but the weather was too bad to travel so she did not go.³⁹ We do know that when the exhibition finally closed after its second reappearance in 1903 nearly two million people had visited and that it had cost eighty thousand pounds to set up.⁴⁰ Given the size of the Irish population at the time the numbers who attended have to reflect the success of the exhibition as a visitor project.

Working exhibitions in the context of the Cork Exhibition have particular relevance to work opportunities for women. We have seen in the previous chapter how the ceramics trade historically had been one that offered employment to women in all the different aspects of its production. For middle class women with art training it was both a socially acceptable way of earning a living as well as providing a reasonable income. It was therefore imperative that pottery companies continued to market themselves and their products. This theme was partly taken up by the *Cork Examiner* when it reported that the steadily increasing demand for employment amongst women was rendered important by the exhibition, as was the variety of work represented there.⁴¹ Over the 12 years the Della Robbia operated, it provided regular employment for forty-one women using their artistic skills.⁴² This was a relatively high number of women given the very restricted opportunities on Merseyside to work in art related businesses. Harold Bloomfield Bare's report in *The Studio* on The Clarion Guild of Handicraft Exhibition held in 1908, as pointed out in the last chapter, bemoaned the fact that since the closure of the Della Robbia Pottery there was very little alternative employment for people with those skills.⁴³

The contribution made by women in a working exhibition had an additional impact in that women came into the public sphere by their very physical presence. This was unlike normal exhibitions where only their name and work came into the public domain. They were therefore openly seen to be capable and important in their contribution. There are several works made from the Boyle's clay by the artists at the Della Robbia Pottery still in existence. These include vases designed by Charles Collis, Cassandra Walker, Ruth Bare and Harold Rathbone. As was the usual pattern at the Della Robbia Pottery designers were sometimes responsible for painting decoration of other artists' works. Exhibits made at Cork conformed to this pattern. In addition the painters marks of Alice Rathbone and Hannah Jones appear on some pieces. One piece in particular warrants a separate mention because of its beauty and because it epitomises the multi-skilled approach to the creation of ceramics at the Della Robbia Company. This is a small bowl of blue, yellow and green glazes on a white background. There is a continuous repeated Celtic motif and a stippled Celtic design on the inside of the bowl (see illustration 15). The sgraffito design was the work of Charles Collis and the decoration by Cassandra Walker and Hannah Jones. A well-known visitor to the exhibition, Maud Gonne, also signed this particular piece.⁴⁴ For obvious reasons there was a limited workforce from Birkenhead at the Cork Exhibition. Charles Collis was no longer working at the Della Robbia Pottery in 1902 but at Royal Doulton's in Staffordshire. He had been asked back especially to take part in the Birkenhead contribution at Cork.⁴⁵ Apart from Charles Collis and Harold Rathbone himself all the other artists appear to have been female. Marian de Caluwé's mark appears on only one known piece that I have been able to trace; a holy water font in the shape of a crucifix with Celtic motifs, dated 1902. It is not clear whether Marian did attend the exhibition or whether this piece was made later in the year with the Boyle's clay taken back to Birkenhead. My reasoning for questioning her presence at the exhibition is the date of the opening of the exhibition. This was May 1st 1902. Marian's husband Emile died on the thirteenth of May 1902 after being ill with pneumonia for fourteen days.⁴⁶ It would be inconceivable that she was there for the opening of the exhibition, so the holy water font must have been made later in the year either in Cork or back in Birkenhead with the clay brought back from Ireland.

Correspondence with Cork City Museum make it clear that it is not possible to ascertain whether the Cork authorities purchased these Della Robbia pieces, which currently are on display in the Cork and Dublin Museums, at the exhibition itself or at a later period.⁴⁷ Although the Della Robbia exhibit was primarily a working exhibit there would be the expectation that the works produced there would sell. They obviously they did not sell all the pottery produced because Harold arranged a special sale in the December of 1902 of the Cork pieces back in Birkenhead.⁴⁸

One undeniable fact concerning the Cork Exhibition is the importance that Harold Rathbone attached to his company having a presence there. As a result of this he chose to take the best of his artists and designers with him and as a consequence highlighted publicly the role that women had to play in this industry. This role was not only as paintresses, the traditional role associated with the female work force, but also as designers. The Cork exhibition was not the only exhibition where the presence of the female staff from the pottery was in the public eye but it is the only one known for being a working exhibit. For whatever reason, the Cork Exhibition is one that is not documented in any of the major works on exhibitions. The only work where it is given any prominence is that by Richard Cooke in his book *The Mardyke: Cork City's Country Walk in History*.⁴⁹ I refer to this point from the stance of the advantages that are sometimes to be gained from the use of a local study, which is then placed in the context of the national. In this case it is possible to deduce there was a positive advantage to be gained by women at this exhibition but this cannot be acknowledged if the exhibition itself is not acknowledged. The success and size of the Cork Exhibition in comparison with the setting up costs, ranks well with many of the other major exhibitions, which receive frequent attention from historians as for example the 1901 Glasgow Exhibition or the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition.⁵⁰

To conclude then, Harold Rathbone's primary intentions in obtaining a stand at Cork were not for the advantages to be gained for the cause of female professionalism but they were to highlight the ceramic industry and in particular his own company. Nevertheless this objective in itself resulted indirectly in gains for women. One of Rathbone's other major aims was linked to the financial needs of his company.

The question of financial gain for individual companies and for the individual exhibitors is important when placed in the context of the significance of exhibitions for women's careers. Harold Rathbone's company was always in need of financial support. It eventually went into voluntary liquidation in 1906, after only twelve years of trading, unlike two of its contemporaries, Pilkingtons Lancastrian Pottery that survived until 1958 and Howson Taylor's Ruskin Pottery, which closed in 1933. Reference has already been made to some of the financial predicaments of the Della Robbia Pottery in the previous chapter but there were others. The viability of the company had been dubious for a long time and resulted in Rathbone having to prop up the venture with much of his own capital until in 1906 he made the decision not to put any more of his own money into the business. It has been documented that Harold Rathbone had started the company with a capital investment of £5,000 but this is inaccurate.⁵¹ The fifth item listed in the Company Memorandum and Articles of Association stated that "The capital of the Company is £5,000 divided into five hundred £10 shares." A closer examination of the financial records show that there had been a share issue of £5,000 but not all of this had been taken up. By the 31st May 1894, only 304 shares had been taken up and then only at £4 per share, giving a total investment of £1280, far short of the quoted £5,000.⁵² It was in order to counteract this declining financial situation that Harold had amalgamated his company with that of Emile de Caluwé's Statuary and Marble Company in 1900.⁵³ This not only brought in new money but a hoped for increase in market sales by widening the variety of products, in particular church furnishings and decorations. The financial problems were further exacerbated by his mother's death in 1905 given that she had always supported his venture.⁵⁴ Finance obviously played the major part in the decision to liquidate the company.

Nevertheless there were many other valid reasons why the company experienced financial problems, some were self-inflicted and others were beyond personal control. The architectural side of the pottery production had also not resulted in the orders that Harold Rathbone hoped for. Cardinal Vaughan had commented on the beauty and style of the Birkenhead productions but when it came to building Bentley's Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral no orders were forthcoming for

the Della Robbia religious wall plaques or statues.⁵⁵ Documentation from other studio potteries such as Minton makes it very clear that the overheads to sustain studio ceramics were very heavy.⁵⁶ In their own right they were often not viable businesses but in the case of Minton there were the large resources of the main factory to support the artistic side of the company. Even then the financial situation could be tenuous as in 1902 when there was a suggestion that the Minton Company might have to be sold. There was only Harold's personal money to back up his pottery and the four Della Robbia agents in Liverpool could not sell enough of the pottery to sustain the costs of production. Even having agents for the pottery in London like Morris and Company, J. T. Waring and Sons and Liberty's and outlets in Manchester, Paris, and New York did not make the company viable.⁵⁷ In addition there were also showrooms in Liverpool itself. According to Charles Collis one showroom in Cook Street had rent and rates amounting to £7 per week and a later showroom in Berry Street had a manager, Mr. Maggs and an assistant to run it.⁵⁸ Volume of sales still continued to be a problem and by acquiring stands at exhibitions Harold presumably hoped to bring in extra capital. The publicity attached to the exhibitions would also help to advertise the goods and further increase sales.

The actual costs to a company of putting on an exhibit are not clear and in the Della Robbia's case I can not find any records of these. One of the company's most successful exhibitions in terms of publicity was the Manchester Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1894 of which *The Studio* said:

The Della Robbia Pottery produced from the designs of Harold Rathbone assisted by Miss C. Walker filled two cases, which proved to be worthy of prolonged study... Produced at reasonable prices, it is a distinct addition to our local pottery and should attract many patrons.⁵⁹

Given its close proximity to Liverpool it would have also been one of the less costly to be involved in. In the case of the Cork Exhibition substantial travelling and accommodation bills would have accrued over a six months period. We know from family sources that Harold himself spent time in Cork and that Charles Collis was brought back specially to attend the exhibition. Cassandra Walker, Ruth Bare,

Hannah Jones, Alice Rathbone and possibly Marian de Caluwé were all present at Cork. The absence of some of the best artists from Birkenhead must have been at some costs to the company in terms of production. Another exhibition, which did not appear to have been reported in the usual art journals or documented in the current literature on exhibitions, was the Pottery and Porcelain Exhibition, which was held at Green Park Glasgow and opened on December 23rd 1904. Although Glasgow was probably in travelling terms not much closer than Cork, financially and administratively it would have been economically more viable to exhibit at. This was not a working exhibit and therefore did not require the presence of the potters and decorators personally. In the introduction to the exhibition's catalogue, the history and importance of the ceramics industry in Great Britain was emphasised. The list of prestigious exhibitors in the same catalogue also indicates the seriousness with which the major ceramic companies perceived the exhibition at the time.⁶⁰ On loan were large displays of early works by Wedgwood, Chelsea, Bow, Spode and many more besides. Of the modern studio potteries only the Ruskin Pottery and the Della Robbia exhibited. Currently Glasgow City Art Gallery has several very fine pieces of Della Robbia Pottery on display. Archive material held by the Museum indicates that they were purchased at the Green Park Exhibition.⁶¹ These sales to Glasgow City Council were due predominantly to Harold Rathbone's tenacity more than a natural outcome. The letter books of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery contain some correspondence between the City Council and the Pottery Company and point to the fact that the initial approach regarding purchases was made by Harold Rathbone to the Glasgow Corporation:

18th April, 05

Dear Mr. Rathbone,

A sub-committee of the Corporation has just been appointed to deal with the question of purchases from the pottery and porcelain exhibition. I shall certainly draw the attention of that body to your productions, and I entertain the hope that we may be able to acquire some portion of them.

Yours very truly,
Superintendent.⁶²

It is clear from this letter that Harold Rathbone had been eager to find purchasers for his pottery. A further letter dated 26th April 1905 from the Superintendent reveals

that the Corporation was interested in purchasing fifteen pieces of Della Robbia and requests a quote on cost from Harold.⁶³ The price quoted for the fifteen pieces was £46/19/- subject to a 20% discount.⁶⁴ Further letters indicate that Harold was anxious to receive payment but this had to go through council procedures before the cheque for £40/ 8 /6d could be issued. Payment was finally made on 4th July 1905.⁶⁵ The letters indicate how crucial finance and cash flow was to the company and how small the amount involved apparently seemed, even allowing for the then current values. In addition a small company like Della Robbia did not exhibit large quantities at exhibitions because of the nature of the pottery, unlike Royal Doulton who exhibited 1,500 items at the 1893 Chicago International Exhibition.⁶⁶ There is no record of the actual quantity of pottery (other than that to the City Council) sold at the Green Park Exhibition itself. Nevertheless the purchase and display of the Della Robbia pieces in the Glasgow City Art Gallery was of significant importance in terms of publicity to both the individual artists and the company.⁶⁷

From the various accounts we have of the Della Robbia Pottery's attendance at exhibitions it seems very clear that the most financially successful ones seem to be those where the exhibitions themselves were privately organised or held under the title of *Arts and Crafts* or *Home Arts and Industries*. The explanation for this is self-evident. Visitors to these events would know exactly the type of goods that would be on sale to the public and exhibitors would not be there as a supplement to the higher ranked fine art sections. Thus the exhibition itself would be more targeted. One of the most publicised of Harold's exhibitions was his "at home" held in London in 1897 at Waring's in Oxford Street which, was opened by the Princess Louise and attended by celebrities like Sarah Bernhardt.⁶⁸ Apart from the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions, the Home Arts and Industries Exhibitions were also successful venues for the Birkenhead Company despite the organisation's connotations of amateurism. One report in *The Studio* by Aymer Valance concerning this exhibition said:

The Exhibition of the Home Arts and Industries becomes increasingly attractive year by year as the Association extends.... In pottery the artistic standard was scarcely so high as it might have been, but the Della Robbia Ware under the management of Messrs. Conrad Dressler and Harold Rathbone, at Birkenhead, has the merit of being quaint in style, and of a very distinctive quality.⁶⁹

Two years later in the same magazine Gleeson White in reporting on the 1896 Home Arts and Industries Exhibition wrote:

The big stand of "Della Robbia" Ware under the direction of Mr. Harold Rathbone showed a few new departures, mainly in the form of low relief figure panels, and one (by Mr. Conrad Dressler) in high relief, with really beautiful modelling in its figures.⁷⁰ For the rest the ideas of former years were maintained. Taking it on its own ground there is much to praise. It is decorated pottery rather than pottery decorative by and in itself, but having said so much, we may praise it highly for the manner in which it accomplishes its purpose. A panel copied from an Utamaro colour print was at least novel, but a jar designed by Miss Gwendoline Buckler, which gained the "gold cross" illustrated here (p.98), was perhaps the most striking of many ingenious and graceful designs. Mr. Harold Rathbone's work "after Ford Madox Brown " and from his own designs also deserves special notice.⁷¹

Financial gain for the exhibitor, in this case Harold Rathbone, was more crucial than for many other potteries since nearly the entire Della Robbia workforce relied on the company's economic viability for their livelihood. If the company ceased to exist Merseyside could not offer them alternative employment; whereas if the Doulton and Minton factories closed there was alternative employment to be found in the hundreds of other small potteries in Staffordshire. Apart from financial gains for the exhibiting companies there is also the financial aspect for those exhibiting in their own individual right.

The extant catalogues of the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibitions list all the names of the exhibitors, their exhibits and the price at which they were to be sold. The names of many of the female workers at the Della Robbia Pottery exhibiting in their own right are to be found in these lists. The works catalogued also emphasise that they were not restricted to works in the decorative arts but also in the fine arts of painting and sculpture. Where the work did sell there were obvious financial gains for the women. For example, Annie Beaumont, a regular exhibitor in watercolours and oil, entered a watercolour painting in 1896 entitled *Roses* and priced at five guineas.⁷² Cassandra Walker frequently exhibited pieces which, were catalogued under sculpture, as, for example, her altar panel *St. Catherine* exhibited in both 1901

and 1902 priced at 10 guineas.⁷³ An oil painting *An Old Breton* by Marian de Caluwé was also priced at 10 guineas.⁷⁴ Compared to some of the notable female artists of the period, whose works also appeared in the same exhibitions, the financial amounts involved were very minimal. Evelyn De Morgan's sketch *Boreas and Oreithya, The Bride of the North Wind* exhibited in 1900 had a price label of £300.⁷⁵ Nevertheless the amounts were substantial in the context of their presumed weekly wages. In the previous chapter the question of wages was discussed and the fact there are no financial records in existence for the pottery, which indicate the level of salaries the artists were paid for their work. Assumptions were made that these were on a par with other studio potteries like the Royal Doulton and Pilkingtons. The assumption had some credence in the context of remarks made by Charles Collis about wages when he indicated that he earned approximately 20/- per week.⁷⁶ Jeremy Cooper indicated that "The refined girls responsible for the colour decoration earned about fifteen shillings a week." This would have put Charles Collis at the high end of the scale, the lowest being the 5/- per week for the apprentices who prepared the hollowware.⁷⁷ Designers like Cassandra Walker would have been at the top end of the scale. A sale therefore of 4 guineas would have been the equivalent of a month's salary. The financial advantages in exhibiting are predicated on the assumption that the works of art sold.

Exhibition catalogues provide historians with the names of the artists, the titles of their works and prices that these works of art were expected to fetch but it is rare that sales registers for these same works are to be found. The Archives of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool are unusual in that they do contain nearly all the registers of sales for their Autumn Exhibitions. These registers give a rare insight into the financial component of exhibiting since these registers give both the catalogue price and the actual sale price of the works of art. The fact that the gallery hosted works by the most famous and successful artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century adds to the importance of these registers. Through the registers it is possible to glimpse some of the implications of exhibiting for women at the time the Della Robbia Pottery was in existence as demonstrated in table1.

Table 1 is only a random and cursory look at the financial implications for exhibitors. A much more detailed analysis of these and any other registers in existence is required for any major conclusions to be drawn about the late Victorian art market. There are however some important points demonstrated by the table.

Table 1. Examples of Sales Figures documented in the Walker Art Gallery Exhibitions Registers.

| Name | Date | Exhibit Number | Catalogue Price | Price Sold | Amount Received less Commission |
|--------------------------|------|------------------------|-----------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| Della Robbia Co. | 1900 | 1461, 63, 65 | | £11-19-0 | £11-7-0 |
| Mary Palethorpe | 1900 | 731 | 10gns. | 6gns. | £5-15-6 |
| Harold Rathbone* | 1900 | 803 | 8gns. | 8gns. | £7-19-6 |
| Spencer Stanhope | 1900 | 1141 | £300 | £115 | £100 |
| Annie Beaumont* | 1901 | 835 | 5gns | £4-0-0 | £3-14-9 |
| Della Robbia Company | 1901 | 1539, 1611, 1619, 1628 | | £17-11-3 | £16-13-8 |
| Lily Whaite | 1901 | 611 | £16 | 10gns | £9-14-0 |
| May Cooksey | 1902 | 985 | £52-10-0 | £52-10-0 | £49-17-6 |
| Della Robbia Company | 1902 | 4 Items | | £7-19-0 | £7-11-1 |
| Ruth Bare* | 1903 | 1662 | 17/- | 17/- | 16/1d |
| Della Robbia Company | 1903 | 7 Items | | £12-1-6 | £11-9-5 |
| Phoebe Traquair | 1903 | 1592 | 6gns. | 6gns. | £5-19-8 |
| Ruskin Pottery Company | 1903 | 11 Items | | £3-3-0 | £2-19-10 |
| Ellen Clacy | 1904 | 322 | £100 | £75-0-0 | £70-0-0 |
| Della Robbia Company | 1904 | 1804 | 3gns. | 3gns. | £2-19-0 |
| Ruskin Pottery Company | 1904 | 8 Items | | £4-9-0 | £4-2-3 |
| (Alice) Maud Cunningham* | 1905 | 728 | 3gns. | 3gns. | £2-19-10 |
| May Cooksey | 1905 | 1427 | 8gns. | 8gns. | £7-19-7 |
| Lily Day | 1905 | 1803 | £1-10-0 | £1-10-0 | £1-8-6 |
| Ruskin Pottery Company | 1905 | 9 Items | | £2-14-0 | £2-11-4 |
| Della Robbia Company | 1905 | 21 Items | | £19-11-9 | £18-12-2 |

The names of Exhibitors marked with * indicate Della Robbia artists exhibiting in their own right.

The first concerns the Della Robbia Pottery Company. The purchases made by Glasgow City Corporation in 1904 can now be seen in the context of sales at the Walker Art Gallery, the former being much larger. It also explains Harold Rathbone's anxiety to receive the money from the Glasgow Corporation since this was a significant amount for the company. Secondly the table illustrates that even

the successful artists like Spencer Stanhope were ready to make huge concessions when it came to sales of their works. Thirdly the table illustrates the point concerning the additional income that exhibiting could provide for women working at the Della Robbia Pottery and for women generally.

So for the women there were personal financial gains to be had by exhibiting. For men like Charles Collis, John Fogo and Tom Hall, three very talented males working at Birkenhead whose artistic careers were all known to have been hindered by lack of money there were also potential financial gains to be made. Surprisingly none of these men exhibited. Why did they not make use of the opportunity afforded them to exhibit at the Walker Art Gallery? This question is more complicated than it seems at first, as is the question of why the women exhibited in the fine arts although employed in the decorative arts. Sometimes the same women exhibited works that were not for sale as for example Marion Walker's miniatures of her nephews exhibited in 1901 or the sketch of *Taintree* by Ruth Baier (Bare) in 1909.⁷⁸ Financial rewards from sale of works were important but obviously not the whole reason for exhibiting. The answer to why the men did not exhibit and the women did may be perhaps found partly in another important element of exhibitions, namely publicity for the exhibitor. Personal publicity for an artist could be considered as one of the most crucial components in developing a career.

In the case of Harold Rathbone, publicity both for himself and his company, was undoubtedly a driving force. His whole personality seemed to be based on eccentric behaviour calculated to draw attention to himself.⁷⁹ He sometimes had an erratic and unpredictable approach to the sale of his products. On one occasion he refused to allow a customer to take a piece of pottery from the Bold Street Showroom in Liverpool which they had just purchased having decided it was no longer for sale.⁸⁰ Fanny Dove Lister of the Sandon Society encountered the wrath of some members of the society by agreeing to allow Harold to hold an exhibition in one of their rooms without first obtaining permission from the Painters and Sculptors Group. It was not so much the exhibition but Harold's eccentric behaviour that incensed the members. For example his posters invited "Stockbrokers of Liverpool come to my beautiful Exhibition".⁸¹ Despite his eccentricity he did put a great deal of time in

arranging for the company's products to be exhibited. We know from his mother's and sister's diaries that he was genuinely pleased when he did achieve successful sales at these events. In his sister's diary we read, "Sunday June 16th 1895 Harold came to lunch: he was in great spirits about his potteries and the Home Exhibition as he has sold many of his pots"⁸²

And in his mother's diary we read:

Harold also had a stall at the Home Industries at the Albert Hall. The Queen came and bought several pieces of their finest Della Robbia. The queen is very deaf. She always takes great interest in wanting to know how things are made. She has a sweet voice and speaks very low. She asked Harold who designed the vases. Princess Victoria also bought a jar and she turned to Harold in a low voice "Don't pack my things with Mama's".⁸³

There is no doubt that in the reports on the major exhibitions where Della Robbia was shown, some mention was made of the pottery and this was usually a favourable one. Nevertheless it needs to be acknowledged that some of these reports were written by the architect Harold Bloomfield Bare, the father of Ruth Bare, one of the artists at the Birkenhead Company. Harold Bloomfield Bare was the Liverpool correspondent for the regular feature *Studio Talk* in *The Studio* magazine. Despite this bias the reports meant publicity for both the individual artists and the company. One of the annual exhibitions at which the Della Robbia Pottery had a stand and which received good publicity was the Clarion Guild of Handicrafts. Reports in the *Clarion* newspaper about its Guild of Handicraft Exhibitions were always flattering because Julia Dawson, the journalist who organised the exhibitions, relied on the presence of professional companies to draw the crowds and to avert any charge of amateurism about the guild's own exhibits. The *Clarion* newspaper and its Guild of Handicrafts were household names in the early 1900s but current knowledge of their existence is confined to the very few. Walter Crane as a committed socialist and leading figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement was one of the Clarion Guild's most ardent supporters.

Overall the quantity of publicity accorded the pottery was probably out of proportion to its size and level of production. This was in some respects due to both Harold's

character and the Rathbone family connections. Nevertheless the personal publicity that Harold craved and received via exhibitions was to the advantage of his company and directly to his workforce. This personal recognition and pursuit of professional status is perhaps the most important factor when considering the relevance of exhibitions to women artists. It was this denial of opportunity for personal recognition that Anthea Callen argued arose out of the male domination of the Arts and Crafts Societies. Her argument loses some of its strength in that this exclusion was not confined to just the Arts and Crafts societies. Even as late as 1901 a report in *The Studio* related how Phoebe Traquair was denied membership to the Royal Scottish Academy:

A question of wider interest than acceptance or refusal of associateship by any individual was brought into prominence by the recent election. This is the eligibility of women for membership. It does not seem to have been clearly decided, and it is said legal opinion is being taken, but the Academy Council accepted nomination of a number of ladies, including Mrs. Traquair, Miss Cameron, and Miss Meg Wright, all of whom are artists of distinct gifts. Considering academic tradition it is perhaps needless to say, that no woman was elected.⁸⁴

The report went on to say that the paucity of votes, which Phoebe Traquair received, was indicative of the narrow mindedness of painters. Three out of four academicians had probably not taken the trouble to view her murals and “that they were the work of a lady was evidently enough for them.”⁸⁵ In some situations women did find themselves unable to acquire membership of the high profile societies and consequently unable to exhibit. This however was not the overall position and many women did successfully exhibit their work alongside men. The Grosvenor Gallery treated women artists well whether they were amateur or professional. It has been suggested by Christopher Newall that this may have been the result of Lady Lindsay’s influence which led to the principle that a good proportion of women should be invited to exhibit.⁸⁶ Even so, as already noted earlier in the chapter, women’s works were rarely hung in the most prestigious east or west wings of the gallery. Nor was the Grosvenor typical in that many of the women who did exhibit were titled or aristocratic ladies. This was not the situation in Liverpool.

The establishment of the Walker Art Gallery's Autumn Exhibitions in 1871 meant that all artists had the opportunity to exhibit their work whether they had letters after their name or not. This exhibition attracted artists of the highest calibre and was seen by critics as an excellent place to have your work displayed. An anonymous writer in *The Studio* discussed the current status of exhibiting in London compared with that of exhibiting in the provinces:

It is not quite to the credit of London as a centre of artistic feeling that it should be so notoriously such a bad place for artists. Compared with the great provincial towns it is lamentably backward in its support of art, and its annual picture shows can produce very meagre results in the matter of sales. Anyone who takes the trouble to examine the catalogues of the autumn exhibitions of Manchester or Liverpool will be surprised to see what a large proportion of the canvases which have been the sensations of the metropolitan season have failed to secure purchases during the months they have been on view in the galleries, daily crowded with professing art lovers in all ranks of society. Popular favourites and established masters suffer in this respect quite as much as the struggling beginner or half-recognized man of promise, for them all the best harvest is to be gathered in the provinces.⁸⁷

Jane Sellars, in her book *Women's Works*, has analysed the Walker Art Gallery's approach to the exhibitions from the perspective of its purchases of women exhibitors.⁸⁸ Exhibitors came from all over the country and included well-established artists like Helen Allingham, Rosa Bonheur, Evelyn De Morgan, Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes and Harriet Hosmer. Obviously these were in the field of the fine arts but exhibits from the decorative arts were also to be found in the Autumn Exhibitions. Given the liberal attitude the gallery had, particularly in the years that Philip Rathbone chaired the Committee, it is not surprising that so many women showed their works. In addition there was a female member of the hanging committee from 1901, Henrietta Rae. A surprising discovery is the high proportion of women who worked at the Della Robbia Pottery who exhibited at the Autumn Exhibitions and elsewhere (see Table 2).

Table 2 shows that four men from the pottery exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery. Two of these men were Harold Rathbone and Conrad Dressler both well established artists and previous exhibitors at the gallery. That left only two other men concerned with the artistic production at the pottery who also exhibited. If one turns to the

figures for the women we find that 17 exhibited who were in regular employment. If all the artists who worked on commission like Anning Bell and Mary Ellen Rope are excluded from the numbers of employees who worked at the Birkenhead Pottery on the artistic side of the production this leaves approximately forty-nine workers. Twenty-five of these were men of whom only four exhibited their work, whereas out of the twenty-four remaining women, seventeen exhibited.

Table 2 List of all employees who worked on a regular basis at the Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead and exhibited under their own name. The data is compiled from Walker Art Gallery and the Royal Cambrian Academy Exhibition Catalogues and from the *British Artists 1840-1940*.

| Females | Date Exhibited | Places Exhibited | No |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| Ruth Bare | 1902-1930 | WAG | 11 |
| May Barker | 1884-1909 | WAG. LS. RA. BA. RE. SWA. | 21 |
| Annie Beaumont | 1882-1910 | WAG. RCA. | 21 |
| Gwendoline Buckler | 1896 | WAG | 1 |
| Alice Cunningham | 1913 | WAG | 1 |
| Marian de Caluwé | 1891-1910 | WAG | 2 |
| Susannah Firth | 1896-1924 | WAG SWA | 69 |
| May Furniss | 1898-1940 | WAG LS RA RI ROI SWA | 40 |
| Annie Jones | 1903-1906 | WAG | 3 |
| Alice Louise Jones | 1908-1914 | WAG | 17 |
| Aphra Peirce | 1896 | WAG | 1 |
| Edith Trantom | 1893-1907 | WAG B M | 19 |
| Cassandra Walker | 1896-1907 | WAG | 23 |
| Jennie Whitehead | | WAG | 9 |
| Annie Williams | 1895-1907 | WAG | 4 |
| Emily Wood | 1892 | WAG | 1 |
| Violet B. Woodhouse | 1911-1937 | WAG RCA RMS | 53 |
| | | | |
| Males | Date Exhibited | Places Exhibited | No |
| Conrad Dressler | 1883-1899 | RA WAG G NG RHA M B GI | 154 |
| A Griffiths | 1894 | WAG | 1 |
| James Hughes | 1886-1908? | WAG M RHA | 12 |
| Harold Rathbone | 1882-1921 | WAG G GI M NG RCA ROI | 156 |

CODES OF GALLERIES

| | | | |
|-----|--|-----|---|
| WAG | Walker Art Gallery Liverpool | RA | Royal Academy |
| BA | Beaux Arts Gallery | RE | Royal Society of Painters Etchers and Engravers |
| SWA | Society of Women Artists | RCA | Royal Cambrian Academy |
| RI | Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours | | |
| ROI | Royal Institute of Oil Painters | B | Royal Society of Artists, Birmingham |
| M | Manchester City Art Gallery | RMS | Royal Miniature Society |
| G | Grosvenor Gallery | GI | Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts |
| NG | New Gallery | LS | London Salon |

Charles Collis mentioned the names of some female artists who do not appear in the lists of workers given by David Hillhouse in the *Interim Report* or in any other documentation. These included a Miss Davis, a Miss Beckett and a Miss Evans and they are not included in my figures. Some men whose work might be considered to be more technical than artistic would not have been expected to exhibit. But if one also takes into account that one of the most consistent and highly rated men, Charles Collis, did not exhibit, then there are some unanswered questions about these statistics. In particular why did so many women from the pottery exhibit and not the men? There could be several reasons for this situation.

One explanation for the preponderance of female exhibitors that of financial gain has already been discussed and it has been noted that the men were just as much in need of this as the women. Finance may therefore have been a contributory factor but not the main reason. Another reason could have been that exhibiting was seen as behaviour expected of middle class ladies, in other words, an aspect of social class. The female artists at the pottery were viewed by some of the male workers as wealthy young ladies but we know that this was not the case. Class behaviour could have been part of the explanation but again not the whole one. The more likely explanation was probably the need for recognition of their status as artists by the women. The definition of status and what it encompassed was more complicated for women in this period of history. Most of the definitions used by historians are explained in terms of modern feminist theories, whether they be radical, liberal, socialist or Marxist. The issues surrounding female status will be addressed in the next chapter. "Status" could explain why some of the women showed works, which were not for sale, like Marian de Caluwé and Ruth Bare. It could also explain why some of the less high profile workers like Violet Woodhouse also exhibited.

"Status" is also implicit in the continuous coverage, which Art magazines gave to the Walker Art Gallery and its exhibitions. Seeing one's name in print was an added advantage in an art career. *The Magazine of Art* and *The Studio* frequently gave statistics on the number of exhibits entered and the value of the total works sold at the Liverpool exhibitions.⁸⁹ Given that every exhibit appeared in the catalogue along with the exhibitors' name this also could only contribute to raising the profiles of

female artists. Most of the women artists at the Birkenhead Pottery had their name in print over the years in connection with exhibited work like Cassandra Walker, Ruth Bare, Gwendoline Buckler, Hannah Jones and Lizzie Wilkins, thus benefiting from the experience of exhibiting.

So far in this chapter I have discussed exhibitions in the context of the benefits they produced for the whole arena of women's art. There is however one aspect of exhibitions, which on analysis, proved to unexpectedly detrimental to female progress in art. This is where women's works were situated in gendered exhibitions or societies, as in one of the earliest examples of separate classification, the Society of Female Artists. Pamela Gerrish Nunn and Deborah Cherry have both pointed out that, in this setting, the standard of art produced by women and their treatment by the establishment proved to be a contentious issue.⁹⁰ This point is clearly demonstrated when looking at the international exhibitions. Paul Greenhalgh has suggested that the international venues were one of the first and most effective cultural arenas in which women expressed their misgivings with the established patriarchy. At the same time he also acknowledges that these exhibitions highlighted the domestic sphere of female life rather than their artistic achievements.⁹¹ This was because the most prominent of women artists generally chose not to exhibit in the women's pavilions but in the fine art sections alongside their male colleagues.⁹² This emphasis on the domestic role detracted from true art and left women vulnerable to condescension and patronisation towards the works shown in these female pavilions. Two major examples of this occurrence were at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition and the 1893 Chicago Colombian Exhibition. The twenty one-year-old architect Sophia Hayden was commissioned by the women's committee to design the women's pavilion for the Chicago Exhibition. It is significant that she is remembered more for the nervous breakdown she suffered as a result of her commission and her subsequent failure to design any other building than for the design of the building itself. One aspect of the design of this pavilion, which was successful, was by one of the Della Robbia artists, Ellen Mary Rope. She was asked to design four six-foot spandrels in relief of *Faith, Hope, Charity* and *Heavenly Wisdom* for the vestibule for the women's pavilion. These were received positively by the critics.⁹³ Art critics generally felt that separate exhibitions served no useful

purpose where women's art was concerned precisely because women's works were only seen in the context of other women's work and not alongside male work. This division was further exacerbated by the absence of leading female artists at these gendered exhibitions.⁹⁴

It was not only in the international exhibitions that critics took this approach but also in the home exhibitions. The writer in the *Art Journal* reporting on the 1900 Earls Court Women's Exhibition commented that it brought women's work before the public more than ever before:

.....and it gives us a good opportunity of judging of the progress that has been made during the last years in the various departments before us. It may revive the old discussion (if indeed it can be said to have died) as to whether women's work equals that of men, or whether it is inferior, or whether – which is perhaps the safest line to take when discussing the subject with a woman and wishing to conciliate truth with courtesy – it is different.⁹⁵

If one searches other art journals of the period it is possible to discover many similar lines of approach to the subject of female art, namely condescension and patronisation.

The female art societies and exhibitions so far discussed in this chapter are all very familiar to art historians but there is a relatively unknown art society whose history provides an appropriate case study in the context of this chapter. The society was local one and had connections with the Della Robbia Pottery – the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society. The Gwynedd Ladies Art Society consisted of female artists predominantly living in the North Wales area. It owed its existence to the fact that the Royal Cambrian Academy right from its inauguration refused membership to women artists. In 1882 when a prospectus for the Royal Cambrian Academy was sent to thirty-one artists with Welsh connections, a woman artist was discouragingly told that “the committee hadn't come to any determination as to the admission of ladies.”⁹⁶ The Academy did not deviate from this stance over the next few years and as a result a group of women, mainly the wives or daughters of the Royal Cambrian Academy got together to form their own society in 1894.⁹⁷ The society had its first exhibition on Whit-Monday 1895. (See Illustration 17 of an example of one of their

exhibitions.) Its president was Lady Augusta Mostyn (Lady Mostyn was president of the Wrexham Federation of the NUWSS) and honorary members over the years included Mrs. E. M. Ward and Louise Jopling.⁹⁸ By 1900 the Royal Cambrian Academy had slightly modified its attitude and although still refusing membership allowed women to exhibit. Reports on their work in these exhibitions seemed again to be condescending as for example when the writer in the *Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald* remembered “to pay my compliments to young ladies who have been admitted to the exhibition for the display of fruit and flower subjects.”⁹⁹ Lack of progress in admitting female members to the Academy resulted in Lady Augusta Mostyn agreeing in 1900 to build a new gallery for the ladies. This was situated in Llandudno and formally opened in 1902.

This society and its annual exhibitions are an excellent demonstration of the problems that women encountered when placing themselves and their works in a separate environment. Some of the problems would seem unexpected in the context of the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society. First of all the fact that so many of the ladies were related to male artists traditionally in art historical literature implies that they should have had an easier path to follow. Secondly some of the honorary members of the society were some of the leading female artists of the day and sent acclaimed works to these exhibitions, which should have guaranteed some degree of quality and publicity. Mrs. E. M. Ward sent *The Young Pretender at St. Germain* and Louise Jopling sent *Elaine* to the 1898 exhibition.¹⁰⁰ Relationship to male artists and the presence of renowned female artists made no difference in the long-term success of this society.

The financial difficulties encountered by such societies were mirrored in the experiences of the Gwynedd ladies. Membership fees were set at one guinea per annum and this apparently could be deducted from any sales made at the exhibitions. At one exhibition Lily Whaite sold two paintings at two guineas each and after the five per cent deduction of 4/2d and the one guinea fee, she was left with a balance of £2/18/10d.¹⁰¹ Most of the ordinary members’ paintings seem to sell from just under £2 to a maximum of £10 whereas Louise Jopling’s *Elaine* was priced at one hundred and fifty guineas.¹⁰² The net result was that the society could not raise much income

from the commission charged. In addition to the costs of putting on the exhibition itself, the ladies also had the ongoing costs of the annual rental of the gallery. These financial obligations were obviously not easy to keep up since a report on a meeting in 1899 talked of plans to raise the money to pay the rent on the new gallery being built by Lady Mostyn.¹⁰³ The rent in 1901 was £12, in 1902, £14 and in 1903, £30.

In addition to financial problems there were also ones concerning administration. A letter from a committee member, Miss Colyer, to Lily Whaite in 1897 asked if she would be willing to serve as a member of the hanging committee since all those she had asked so far had declined. Lily also declined due to other commitments.¹⁰⁴ When a hanging committee was eventually organised it seemed that chaos reigned. A letter to Lily from Queenie Perrin the secretary described the difficulties of the 1901 event. "Hanging was a scrimmage and catalogue a hurricane. And how the gentlemen of the press are the mighty, slating, slattering, rushing press."¹⁰⁵ In addition Harold Rathbone was there, causing consternation by suggesting Queenie was bound to get the measles.¹⁰⁶

It is clear then that there were few major works exhibited at the Gwynedd Society; that the administration of the society produced problems; that there were financial difficulties and finally that the works exhibited did not receive encouraging or objective criticism from the press. These problems seem to come to a head when in 1903 a letter from the Mostyn Estates to the secretary pointed out that the tenancy of the gallery was dependent on being some practical use to the town of Llandudno and on some improvements in the exhibitions. After three years of renting the galleries to the society Lady Augusta said they would no longer be available to them. This resulted in the secretary sending a letter to all the members requesting them to attend the Annual General Meeting to discuss the matter.¹⁰⁷ I have not been able to establish the outcome of this since there are no further extant records either in the Clarence Whaite Archives or in the Mostyn Estate Archives. The seriousness of Lady Mostyn's decision to withdraw her support has to be gauged from the amount of support she gave to the Society in the years leading up to 1903. She supported the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society both through the financial donations she made, in providing the gallery and her acknowledgement of the existence of the society itself.

This is further reinforced when it is all put into the context that her husband, Lord Mostyn, was the donor of land and buildings (*Plas Mawr*) used by the rival male society, the Royal Cambrian Academy. Her decision to withdraw her support can only be interpreted as a vote of no confidence in the society.

So far only a brief mention has been made of the connection of the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society with the Della Robbia Pottery. From documentation in the Clarence Whaite Archives there is a lot of evidence to suggest close connections between the Whaite and the Rathbone families, not only social and professional but also commercial, as for example when Harold opened the Royal Cambrian Academy Exhibition at *Plas Mawr* in 1894 (see illustration 16). He was also sometimes involved in the sale of Clarence Whaite's works. The connection between North Wales and the Liverpool and Manchester art circles is also a well-known fact. John Finnie, the one time head of the Liverpool School of Art, was a prominent member of the Royal Cambrian Academy. An important factor as far as the Della Robbia workforce is concerned is where they chose to exhibit. In the years that the Della Robbia Pottery was in existence there is evidence that despite Harold's strong links with the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society only one artist, Annie Beaumont, exhibited in the area. She chose not to exhibit with the ladies but at the Royal Cambrian Academy with a painting *Old Lane Near Wakefield* in 1902.¹⁰⁸ Violet Woodhouse also exhibited but this was not until 1928. The implication has to be that the Della Robbia women were happy with the opportunities in Liverpool and saw no advantages to be gained from exhibiting in an all-female society.

To conclude then there were many advantages to be gained for women through exhibitions. These advantages were highly dependent on the type of exhibition, working exhibits being one of the most prominent since they placed women very firmly in the public sphere as opposed to the domestic. Exhibitions such as those of the art schools were an excellent form of publicity for advertising the possibilities available to women, particularly in the decorative arts. The experiences of the female artists at the Birkenhead pottery demonstrate very clearly that one did not have to belong to a professional body to take advantage of the benefits of exhibitions. The Walker Art Gallery led the way in opening up the opportunities for

all sections of society to exhibit their work. There were also personal rewards in having one's work on display to the public both financially and in terms of status. Gendered societies and exhibitions, contrary to the expectations of their instigators, were the least productive. They left women vulnerable to the prejudices of certain male critics and their work incapable of being judged side by side with that of male contemporaries. Finally, the reasons why women chose to exhibit can not be explained completely by the cause of financial independence or the need for professional development but had some link with the desire to obtain some status as a woman as distinct from the status of a woman artist. In other words a desire to have their status as women recognised as being equal to that of men. Two major political movements of this period involved in promoting female status were Socialism and Suffragism. An analysis of the movements is offered in the next chapter in an attempt to answer some questions concerning status.

Illustration 14. Photograph of one of the halls at the 1902 Cork Exhibition, Cork City Museum Archives.

Illustration 15. Della Robbia Pottery bowl made at the Cork Exhibition 1902. Cork City Museum Archives.

Illustration 16. Invitation to the Della Robbia Pottery Christmas Exhibition to the Whaite family, Clarence Whaite Archive, the National Library of Wales.

Illustration 17. The Gwynedd Ladies Art Society Exhibition, *The Art Journal* (1892): 282.

Illustration 18. Oil painting of Phillip Rathbone and his daughter Elfrida by Harold Rathbone circa 1884-1885 recently acquired by the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Birkenhead. Accompanying newspaper cutting from the *Llandudno Advertiser* 14th August 1909.

Notes Chapter Five

¹Cherry, *Painting Women*, 65.

²Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 174-195.

³Kenneth Luckhurst, *The Story of Exhibitions* (London: Studio Publications, 1951); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Exhibitions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World Fairs 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Lionel Lambourne, *Utopian Craftsmen: The Arts and Crafts Movement from the Cotswolds to Chicago* (London: Astragal, 1980).

⁴The first museum in England was the Ashmolean Museum founded in 1683 by Elias Ashmole to house an eclectic collection but not specifically for art.

⁵Luckhurst, *The Story of Exhibitions*, 22.

⁶Lambourne, *Utopian Craftsmen*, 46.

⁷Sir Coutts Lindsay founded the Gallery in 1877. For artists like Walter Crane who were excluded from the R.A for many years, it became their main venue for exhibiting.

⁸For a full account of the workings of the Grosvenor Gallery see Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions. Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁹The plaques, re-titled *The Six Days of Creation* were made in 1901 and one complete set is in the St. Dyfrig's Chapel at Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff.

¹⁰Henry Scott Tuke was a frequent visitor to Falmouth where Miss Charlie (Charlotte) Genn resided with her family.

¹¹Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions*, 116.

¹²*Ibid.*, 133.

¹³Charles Hallé, *Notes on a Painters Life* (London: John Murray, 1909), 172.

¹⁴The names of many of the women working at the Della Robbia Pottery are to be found in the various exhibition catalogues of the Walker Art Gallery 1893-1920 and the Royal Cambrian Academy from 1902-1928, which indicate that their exhibits were both in the fine arts and the decorative arts.

¹⁵F. G. Dumas (ed.), *The Franco-British Exhibition: Illustrated Review* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), 209-216.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁸For details about finances and numbers of visitors of the major nineteenth and twentieth century exhibitions see Luckhurst, *The Story of Exhibitions*, 220-21.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 52.

²⁰Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 217-8.

²¹Frank Burridge, *The Studio* 4 (1894): 98. Burridge eventually became head of the Liverpool School of Art after Finnie's retirement.

²²Harold Bloomfield Bare, *The Studio* 13 (1898): 190.

²³1898 Catalogue of Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition, exhibit number 1435.

²⁴*The Studio* 23 (1901): 276-9.

²⁵Catalogues of Autumn Exhibitions, Walker Art Gallery Archives: The exhibitions were held from 1871-1938.

²⁶National Art Library Catalogue, Victoria and Albert Museum, *Catalogue of Exhibition Catalogues* (Boston, USA: G. K. Hall, 1972), 45.

²⁷*The Studio*, 13 (1898): 192.

²⁸The Art Sheds Sessions Registers 1901-2.

²⁹*The Studio* 17 (1899): 262. Miss Day was then a student at Norwich School of Art but came to Liverpool eventually taking up a lecturing post in brass and copper work at the Art Sheds.

³⁰*The Studio* 20 (1900): 254.

³¹Willet, *Art in a City*, 41.

³²Information panels from Cork City Museum's 1995 exhibition *Hidden Treasures*.

³³*Cork Examiner*, May 7th 1902.

³⁴A working exhibit was a scaled down version of the actual company and its production. It enabled the public to observe the processes involved in making the goods. In the Della Robbia's case this meant continuous demonstrations of all stages of the pottery production by the workers in full display of the public.

- ³⁵His wife was Alice Maud Cunningham who worked at the pottery as a painter. Lorna was their daughter. Jane Steward Rathbone, *Vague Recollections of 1902 and 1903* (Liverpool: Printed for private circulation only), 4-5. Jane Rathbone does not always date the entries in her diary but refers to the day only. The visit by Queen Victoria's son was reported in the *Cork Examiner* 8th May 1902.
- ³⁶Report on the setting up of the exhibition in the *Cork Examiner* 1st May 1902.
- ³⁷*Cork Examiner*, 22nd May 1902.
- ³⁸*Liverpool Evening Echo*, 17th May 1902.
- ³⁹Jane Rathbone, *Vague Recollections of 1902-3*, 8.
- ⁴⁰Information panels from Cork City Museum's 1995 exhibition, *Hidden Treasures*.
- ⁴¹*Cork Examiner*, 7th May 1902.
- ⁴²Details of the work force are that there were 29 male workers, 41 female workers and in addition 7 male artists and 2 female artists working on commission. These figures have been arrived at from information contained in 3 publications: Hillhouse, *An Interim Report; The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906: Exhibition Catalogue*, (Birkenhead: Metropolitan Borough Wirral, 1981); Mary Bennett, *The Art Sheds 1894-1905: Exhibition Catalogue* (Liverpool: Merseyside County Council, 1994).
- ⁴³See Chapter 3, note 67.
- ⁴⁴The vase is now displayed in Cork Public Museum.
- ⁴⁵Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum.
- ⁴⁶Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths.
- ⁴⁷E-mail from Samantha Melia, Library Assistant, Cork City Museum to the writer, 13th April 1999. "When CPM opened in 1945, its collections represented an amalgamation of the former museum along with the collections of the local university. The Della Robbia pieces formed part of one such "old Museum" collection although they were acquired pre-1945, it is impossible to tell when exactly."
- ⁴⁸An invitation to Mr. and Mrs Clarence Whaite states that there will be a special Christmas Exhibition in December 1902, of specimens made at the Cork Exhibition. Clarence Whaite Archives, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. The library had just acquired this archive and it had not been catalogued when I used it in May 1999 but the archivist Dr. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan had selected out specific boxes which, she thought would be relevant.
- ⁴⁹Richard T. Cooke, *The Mardyke, Cork City's Country Walk in History* (Cork: Quality Books, 1990), 78-85.
- ⁵⁰The Cork Exhibition attracted 2 million visitors and cost £80,000 to set up; the 1902 Glasgow Exhibition had 11 million visitors and cost £373,000; the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition had 8 million visitors and cost £798,750.
- ⁵¹Bruce Tatersall, "The Della Robbia Pottery," *Apollo* (1973): 164; Jeremy Cooper, *The Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery 1893-1906* (London: Jeremy Cooper Ltd., 1980), 13.
- ⁵²Della Robbia Company Records, Summary of Capital and Shares 31st May 1894, PRO Kew.
- ⁵³The increasing use of cremations in the 1900's had also led to a decline in the demand for monumental stone masons and may have been a reason for Emile de Caluwé joining Rathbone's company.
- ⁵⁴Joy Robinson, *Relatively Rathbone* (Richmond: Trotman and Company, 1992), 68.
- ⁵⁵See the cover of the Della Robbia's 1900 Catalogue and also the cover of the Cork Exhibition Catalogue.
- ⁵⁶Joan Jones, *Minton: The First Two Hundred Years of Design and Production* (Shrewsbury: Swan Hill Press, 1993), 135.
- ⁵⁷The inside cover of the 1896 Company Catalogue gives a full list of the agents.
- ⁵⁸Letter to Don Richards, 22nd June 1964, Williamson Museum and Art Gallery Archives, Charles Collis File.
- ⁵⁹*The Studio* 5 (July 15th 1895): 136-7.
- ⁶⁰I am grateful to Patricia Collins, Art Curator at the Glasgow Art Galleries and Museums who searched out for me documentation relating to the Della Robbia Pottery and the exhibition including a photocopy of the Exhibition Catalogue.
- ⁶¹Outgoing Correspondence Book, Letter 9th May 1905., Glasgow Art Galleries Archives.
- ⁶²*Ibid.*, 18th April 1905.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, 26th April 1905.
- ⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 9th May 1905.

- ⁶⁵Ibid., 4th July 1905.
- ⁶⁶Yewman, *The Lyle Price Guide to Doulton*, 13.
- ⁶⁷Of the 15 pieces purchased, the present curator of the gallery can account for the whereabouts of 13.
- ⁶⁸Michael Archer, "The Della Robbia Pottery," *Country Life Annual* (1968): 70.
- ⁶⁹*The Studio* 3 (1894): 151-2.
- ⁷⁰This comment implies that though Dressler had formally left the pottery in 1895, either he was still involved or Harold was exhibiting some of his work made previously at the pottery; see Chapter 4, note 17.
- ⁷¹*The Studio* 8 (1896): 99. Gwendoline Buckler, the daughter of the vicar of Bidston, studied at the Liverpool School of Art and was one of the instigators of the campaign for nude life classes for women.
- ⁷²Catalogue of Walker Art Gallery Exhibition 1896.
- ⁷³Ibid., 1901, 1902.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., 1891.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., 1900.
- ⁷⁶Charles Collis refers to a newspaper report, which said that some of the pots were selling at £2 each which he said was nearly two weeks wages, Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Archives.
- ⁷⁷Cooper, *The Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery*, 19. Although Cooper cites the anonymous article in *The Artist*, November 1896 this does not actually give rates of pay. His reference for these rates is undocumented but fits with those of other studio potteries like Pilkington's.
- ⁷⁸Her surviving great niece Miss Walker remembers these being in her father and uncle's possession.
- ⁷⁹Joy Robinson, *Eccentrics*, 1999. This unpublished essay for private circulation only on her Rathbone family eccentrics lists many incidents concerning her Uncle Harold's eccentricity.
- ⁸⁰Helen Williams, "Interview With Gertrude Russell," *Northern Ceramic Newsletter* (March 1978): 7.
- ⁸¹Bisson, *The Sandon Studio Society and the Arts*, 67.
- ⁸²Transcripts of the Diaries of Ethel Rathbone Whitehead, 16th June 1895, Private papers of Joy Robinson.
- ⁸³Jane S. Rathbone, *Vague Recollections of 1902 and 1903*, 5.
- ⁸⁴*The Studio* 22 (1901): 280.
- ⁸⁵Ibid. At a recent auction by Sharpes in Edinburgh a silver chalice *Psyche* sold for £17,500 and an illustrated book sold for £29,000 both by Phoebe Traquair.
- ⁸⁶Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions*, 23.
- ⁸⁷Anon., "Studio Talk," *The Studio* 6 (1896): 53.
- ⁸⁸Jane Sellars, *Women's Works* (Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1988).
- ⁸⁹A report on the 1901 exhibition said 66,000 visitors had attended and 160 paintings sold, *The Studio* 22 (1901): 49.
- ⁹⁰Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, 74; Cherry, *Painting Women*, 67.
- ⁹¹Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 174.
- ⁹²Ibid.
- ⁹³*Magazine of Art* (1893): 324.
- ⁹⁴For example a report in the *Art Journal Supplement of the Chicago and Colombian Exhibition* (1893): xiii.
- ⁹⁵*Common Cause* (14th November 1912); *Art Journal* (July 1900): 219.
- ⁹⁶Peter Lord, *Clarence Whaite and the Welsh Art World: the Betws-y-coed Artists' Colony, 1844-1914* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1998), 117.
- ⁹⁷I have analysed the membership of both societies and approximately seventeen females were related to RCA members. Female names were abstracted from several documents in the Clarence Whaite Archives, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.
- ⁹⁸*Art Journal* (1898): 282.
- ⁹⁹Lord, *Clarence Whaite and the Welsh Art World*, 143.
- ¹⁰⁰*Art Journal* (1898): 282.
- ¹⁰¹Clarence Whaite Archives, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, box 26.
- ¹⁰²Ibid., box 28.
- ¹⁰³Ibid., box 26.
- ¹⁰⁴Ibid., letter April 1897, box 28.
- ¹⁰⁵Ibid., Box 2.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., letter 8th July 1901, box 2

¹⁰⁷Ibid., box 26

¹⁰⁸Exhibition Catalogues of the Royal Cambrian Academy.

CHAPTER SIX

Hidden Socialism and Suffragism at the Della Robbia Pottery

One of the unanswered questions in the last chapter concerned the motivation of the Della Robbia women artists to exhibit their work when their male colleagues were reluctant to do so. The suggestion was made that perhaps their reasoning was to acquire “status”. One of the definitions of “status” in the *Oxford Concise Dictionary* is that of “relative importance.” Two of the best-known political movements concerned with the “relative importance” of women were Socialism and Suffragism. The rise and consolidation of these movements also coincided with the life span of the Della Robbia Pottery (1894-1896). It is therefore unlikely that the two movements did not have some influence on the lives of the women artists at Birkenhead or that the women themselves were passive or impervious to their influence. In my initial research on the Della Robbia Company, the emphasis seemed to be predominantly on the pottery itself and its method of production. There was no suggestion that the Pottery Company or any individual was linked with Socialism or Suffragism. Given the paucity of biographical information on the workers this was not unexpected. What is meant by Suffragism in this period is very clear but Socialism appears more complex. The Socialism of the late nineteenth century therefore needs some discussion in the context of the artistic community of that period.

The Socialism upheld by William Morris and his followers had a different connotation to what we now understand by modern Socialism. In a previous chapter we saw that the organisation with the strongest links to Socialism was that of the Arts and Crafts Movement and that the aim of many of its leading figures was to bring about a change, which would result in a more egalitarian society. The most public and artistically prolific of these figures was Walter Crane and the most high profile was William Morris. One of the ways to bring about social change was through the medium of art itself and many of these public figures wrote extensively about the relationship of art to Socialism in the context of the Arts and Crafts Movement.¹ This was very much based on a Utopian idealism similar to that outlined in Morris’s book *News From*

Nowhere. Morris set his book in the year 2012 AD. When a visitor (Morris himself) from the nineteenth century goes forward in time to the year 2012 he finds a new society in existence, which was completely devoid of a capitalist economy. This change had been effected crucially not through reform but through a non-violent “revolution.” This new society was one in which art could now truly flourish.

There were many female artists who had strong associations with Socialism but even stronger ones with Suffragism.² It is not surprising though, that of all the professions, artists (as well as writers and actresses) were to the forefront in the fight to obtain the vote for women.³ These women were well educated by the standards of the time. They were trained in a co-educational environment at the Art Schools both in England and on the Continent and thereby experienced in the perceptions of equal opportunities for both sexes. They had also experienced some of the freedom that this level playing field brings with it, including financial independence. By the very nature of their profession they were acknowledged to be individualistic and non-traditional in their thinking and consequently daring and ready to confront society on issues which they considered were illogical and unjust. In many cases birth or marriage related them to male artists who had confronted the establishment and openly supported their female relatives in their political stance.⁴

The Suffrage Movement saw how useful artists could be in publicising the cause, as did the artists themselves. It was to this end that two societies were formed, the Artist Suffrage League and the Suffrage Atelier. The Artist Suffrage League was founded in 1907, the first of the Suffrage societies for professional women. Its object was “to further the cause of Women’s enfranchisement by the work and professional help of artists” and it was closely linked to the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies.⁵ Tickner says, “The exact membership of the society remains hazy as does what might have actually accounted as membership in terms of informal affiliation, subscriptions or the publication of finished designs. No list of members survives, although published accounts give donations and subscriptions under a separate heading.”⁶ The chairman of

the league was Mary Lowndes, renowned for her stained glass designs and possibly also a member of the Liverpool Sandon Society.⁷ In essence the Artist Suffrage League was a society for professional women artists and not for amateurs. The other organisation, the Suffrage Atelier, was founded in February 1909 “with the special object of training in the Arts and Crafts of effective picture propaganda for the Suffrage” and of forwarding “the women’s Movement by supplying pictorial Advertisements, Banners and Decorations.”⁸ Training women to use their artistic skills for propaganda was high on their agenda and probably the reason that the Atelier was open to all, unlike the Artist Suffrage League.

Until relatively recently women’s suffrage history, as also to lesser extent women in Socialism, has concentrated on the national issues rather than local. This has created two problems for historians. The first is that of national historical interpretation being based on events that take place in high profile areas such as London and the local picture ignored because it is not considered important enough to affect the outcome of the general picture. Jill Liddington and Jill Norris in their now classic work *One Hand Tied Behind Us* demonstrated significantly how history has to be reinterpreted in the light of the knowledge gained through subjecting local events to analysis in the context of the national.⁹ Until relatively recently the history of the Suffrage Movement on Merseyside has also suffered from lack of attention by historians. Krista Cowman’s Ph.D. thesis has started to readdress this situation, as has the work by Marij Van Helmond for the exhibition *Votes for Women – The Liverpool Story* held in 1989/90.¹⁰

The second significant problem in Suffrage history is that easily accessible written information is only available on high profile individuals rather than ordinary individuals. Merseyside is no exception to this rule. For example there are well-documented reports on the Liverpool artist Patricia Woodlock, daughter of the artist David Woodlock, because of the circumstances surrounding her imprisonment.¹¹ Sometimes information is available because the individuals were officers of the various societies or part of the social establishment as in the case of the Liverpool suffragist,

Nan Muspratt, whose photograph and a brief biography appeared in a book entitled *Great Suffragists and Why* published about 1909.¹² However in the case of Mary Cox Palethorpe and her sister Fanny, both Liverpool artists who were also imprisoned, there is little written information about their suffrage activities. In Marij van Helmond's book Mary is listed as serving a prison sentence, contributing her art to raise money and the use of her studio but nothing in depth.¹³ Painstaking searches through suffrage journals such as *The Common Cause*, *The Vote* and *The Women's Franchise*, as Tickner suggested, can highlight the extent to which local activities took place and the strength of the support for the cause. More importantly lists of donations and branch meetings published in these journals often reveal the names of some of the local activists.¹⁴ Liverpool also suffers from the disadvantage that the group of buildings, which housed some local records and archives, was destroyed during a bomb raid in the Second World War. So although we have "private" individuals who were likely to have been Suffragists there does not appear to be much written evidence to verify their identity. In the case of the Della Robbia women, we are looking for evidence about women who also had fulltime jobs as artists and at the same time were also trying to continue to educate themselves at evening classes. Of particular relevance, as far as this thesis is concerned, is the fact that there was also no branch of the Artist Suffrage Society or Atelier in Liverpool and consequently no straightforward source of information on local artists and Suffragism.¹⁵

It is for this reason I have given the title *Hidden Suffrage and Socialism at the Della Robbia Pottery* to this chapter. "Hidden" in this sense refers to the possibility that the two activities could well have been a reality for the women at the pottery but because of the way history is often recorded, there is no public acknowledgement of its existence. "Hidden" also refers to a time context in that it is hidden from current knowledge but during the years the pottery functioned it could have been openly perceived and acknowledged. The purpose of this chapter is therefore twofold. One is to investigate whether there is any evidence of the two movements being actively being pursued by any of the workers at the pottery either male or female. The other is to analyse the

influences this involvement would have had, if it existed, on the artistic profession of the women and indeed the men, in the context of feminist theory.

Modern research shows that our political and social leanings are often acquired in childhood from our parents and immediate families.¹⁶ This can sometimes work in the reverse and result in individuals who tread a very different path to that of their family but on the whole there is some validity in the generalisation I have made. In this context the possession of biographical information is essential if some judgement is to be made on whether key figures at the Della Robbia Pottery could have been potentially proactive in either Socialism or Suffragism and to what end. This biographical information was obtained using the methodology of family genealogists, which in turn led to the discovery of surviving relatives who were then able to add more valuable information.

The most important figure is Harold Rathbone. As director of the Della Robbia Pottery Company, if it can be shown he openly supported either Socialism or Suffragism, then the corollary can be assumed that there would be no conflict of interests if his employees followed the same political leanings. His Quaker and Unitarian background meant that he was surrounded by people from two religious movements who were renowned for their enlightened approach to the status of women. Harold was therefore brought up in a family where social reform and equality for women was fully accepted. His father Philip Rathbone's attitude towards women was manifestly liberal as for example when he invited Henrietta Rae (Mrs. Normand) in 1893, to be part of the hanging committee of the internationally renowned Autumn Exhibition, the first woman in England to be invited onto such a committee. As far back as 1869 Harold's uncle, the MP William Rathbone 6th, presented the suffrage petition organised by Josephine Butler to parliament. Harold's younger cousin was Eleanor Rathbone (1872–1948) not only a key figure in the Liverpool Suffrage Movement but also a national one. Eleanor was a student at Oxford University, Liverpool's first woman councillor and an elected MP in 1929. One of her major achievements was the legislation giving family allowances to

women. There can be no stronger evidence that the Rathbone family ethos was pro suffrage but this did not necessarily mean that all the family were supporters. The key questions in relation to Harold Rathbone are therefore was he proactive in the Suffrage or in the Socialist Movement, what were his motives if he was and what were the implications for his pottery workers?

I briefly want to apply my generalisation that nurturing often gives rise to adult attitudes, to some of the other key personalities at the pottery, on the same basis as I have done with Harold. Charles Collis (1879 - 1967) was one of the youngest workers at the pottery, having started in June 1895.¹⁷ He was 5' 4" tall and wore spectacles, which he himself considered "to be a handicap in the employment market."¹⁸ He continues "I was destined by fate not by me to have the longest service and produced more designs than anyone else, the ordinary boys from working class homes had no artistic aspirations, decorating pots was a job and (they) left for other work."¹⁹ Tom Hall was one of the ordinary boys at the pottery. He came from a very poor home but won a scholarship at elementary school to art school. After leaving the Liverpool College at aged seventeen years he joined the Della Robbia Pottery. He stayed only a short time and left to work as a sign writer and illuminator. Gertrude Russell a female artist considered this was a waste since he was a very talented man.²⁰ Another male colleague and employee at the pottery was John Fogo. John in his own words described himself at being very good at freehand. Harold wanted him to study art and offered him free board and lodging with the promise he would one day have R.A after his name. John however chose to leave for an apprenticeship at Laird's Shipyard.²¹

Charles Collis was untypical of the men generally at the Della Robbia in that he had ambitions to be an artist of some standing and the determination to succeed. Fogo described him as the "boss of potting " and "not very strong." ²² (This probably had some factual basis since he was rejected for the army in 1914 on health grounds.) It was very clear from his own scribbled notes on his life at the pottery that he was very much from the working classes. He attended one of the local schools in Birkenhead, St.

Anne's, and his father worked at the Birkenhead docks.²³ It is thought that he also had some training at the Burslem Art School.²⁴ It was a constant struggle for him to exist on the wages paid to men in the pottery despite him being one of the most talented and able designers and painters.²⁵ He was also somewhat of a philosopher on life's problems. He starts his undated recollections with the words "A graduate of the Pottery University of Adversity" and on the closure of the pottery "It was a commercial age and we were artists not industrialists."²⁶ In response to a question of whether his Della Robbia vases were valuable he responded: "Two men looked through prison bars, one saw the stars the other mud"²⁷

He also appeared to work quite happily with the women artists and had genuine friendships with them. As we know this was not true of all the men at the pottery many of whom saw the women artists as middleclass, wealthy young ladies from the Wirral and Liverpool who were filling in time or indulging in a pleasant pastime.²⁸ Aphra Peirce was one of Charles's female friends. She left the pottery in 1900 to work at the Doulton Pottery. It was through her that Charles also obtained employment at the same pottery when he left the Della Robbia for a brief spell also in 1900.²⁹ Further family background gleaned from the postcards written by Charles after the Birkenhead pottery closed down and deposited by his younger sister at the Williamson Art Gallery before her death, gave no indication that neither he or his close family were proactive politically. Charles may have had much to gain from Socialism and the future Welfare State but there was no evidence that he supported this stance.

Cassandra Walker appears to have been of a different social class to Charles Collis being seen by some of her female colleagues as "high and mighty."³⁰ Her grandparents were Henry and Margaret Walker, who lived not far from the cathedral in Wakefield, where her grandfather was Clerk of the Wakefield Charities. The duties of the clerk required a degree of education that would necessitate literacy, numeracy and some management and organisational skills.³¹ Her father, Rowland Ramsden Walker, was an accountant with the Cheshire Rail Line and had moved from Wakefield to London

(where he married Emily Anne Worthington) and then to Liverpool to continue his career. Cassandra grew up along with her four sisters and brother in various parts of Liverpool ranging from the village of Little Woolton to Halewood Road and eventually to Livingstone Road in Sefton Park, addresses all in socially acceptable areas.³² She and her siblings obviously all benefited from a good education as evidenced from their subsequent careers. In the first chapter of this thesis I traced Cassandra's education through art school both at the University Art Sheds and the Liverpool School of Art. We also know that in 1894 the Liverpool Education Committee awarded her sister Marion the prestigious travelling art scholarship valued at £60 per annum for three years.³³ The sisters also shared a studio in Colquitt Chambers right in the heart of Liverpool.³⁴ Some years later the Liverpool Corporation employed her as sessional art teacher in a technical school in Wavertree.³⁵ She died in Paris circa 1914-15 probably of tuberculosis.³⁶ Her brother William was described as a solicitor in the 1891 Census and had offices in central Liverpool. Cassandra's other three sisters all had interesting careers. Juliette was a nurse in the 1914 War and after the war went to live in China with her husband for a period. May also nursed but never married. Ellen was a violinist who played with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. She also taught music and did not marry.³⁷

Cassandra worked at the Della Robbia Pottery for most of the twelve years it existed. The other workers perceived her as coming from a wealthy family. The term wealthy has to be taken in context here and my research shows that finance was an issue for her. If she had been truly wealthy she would probably not have applied for the travelling or crafts scholarships on offer to Liverpool art students.³⁸ Probate records show that when her father died in 1919 he left £1402-2-8d, which would imply comfort rather than wealth.³⁹ Given also that the family moved addresses frequently, they presumably rented their accommodation, as was the pattern of the time. There is no strong evidence from her family background available to say categorically that Cassandra would or would not have supported Suffragism or Socialism.

Ruth Bare (born Cecilia Ruth Bare) very definitely came from a professional family. Her father, the architect, Harold Bloomfield Bare was well known and respected on Merseyside. He had trained as an architect under Charles Edmund Giles in the early 1860's and he started work in 1876 in an independent practice in Liverpool.⁴⁰ When Ruth was 9 years old the family went to live in America where her father hoped to advance his career in the rapidly expanding artistic centre of Philadelphia. This obviously did not create the opportunities he hoped for and the family returned to England when Ruth was 14 years old. An indication of their financial state is demonstrated by the fact that Ruth returned alone to England before the rest of the family just before her 14th birthday in order to save on an adult fare.⁴¹ From reading family papers of a leading member of the Liverpool Positivist Church (Albert Crompton) it is very clear that Ruth's family were active members of the Positivist Church even before they went to America.⁴² Ruth married Otto Baier, a German science student (also a Positivist) in 1907. Otto became the leader of the Liverpool Positivist Church on December 21st 1929.⁴³ Private papers in the Baier family point to the fact that Ruth remained an active member of the Liverpool Positivist Church. The congregation had dwindled to single figures just after the war and the Church in Upper Parliament Street was sold in 1947.⁴⁴ Some of the pottery she made at the Della Robbia displayed the Positivist motto *Il progresso sia il nostro scopo*.⁴⁵ Comtean philosophy, on which Positivism was founded, was very specific in its teachings about the role women had to play in society and this aspect will be dealt with in the next chapter of the thesis. It is sufficient to say at this point that women were expected to devote their priorities to their family, if their financial circumstances allowed them to. As a result of this doctrine the Positivist Movement was opposed to the campaign for women's suffrage. A three-part article in *The Women's Franchise* in 1908 defended the stance taken by the Positivists in opposing the vote for women.⁴⁶ The articles were written by Frederick Harrison the head of one of the two London Congregations; a man who had achieved a certain amount of notoriety as a vigorous campaigner for the trade unions, the Paris Commune and other radical causes. It was an extremely well written and thought provoking defence of Positivist doctrine. The editor of the journal went so far

as to recommend her readers to his work for a fair minded, logical argument against women's suffrage. She wrote, "Suffragists, especially, will be interested to meet an opponent whose conception of the powers and duties of women, is hardly, if at all, lower than their own."⁴⁷ The great gap between the Suffragists and Positivists was based on the premise that to give women the vote would detract from their higher calling. Given that Ruth Bare was a true adherent to her church she was not likely to be a supporter of women's suffrage. The same conclusion cannot be drawn in relationship to Socialism since this was a strong part of her church's teaching.

Marian de Caluwé has been somewhat of an enigma to Della Robbia Pottery historians because so very little was known about her and what was known was inaccurate. Documentary evidence shows that Marian's father originated from Falmouth and was a civil servant in the Customs and Excise department at the Liverpool docks. The Falmouth branch of the family was well known in Cornish circles and took a leading part in many social issues in the area. Marian herself was one of 4 girls all of whom had been educated at Blackburne House in Liverpool; a school that we know was a forerunner of equal opportunities for education for women. Her father John Hawke Genn was also a very active member of the Hope Street Unitarian Church, a church that had progressive ideas on the education and status of women.⁴⁸ It is clear then that her family would be open to potentially being supporters of women's suffrage. However there is a problem with this in that the pamphlet written by Hillhouse about the pottery describes her and her husband as being members of the Positivist Church.⁴⁹ This is based on the evidence of an interview given by a Dr. Francis Guercio (whose family were members of the Liverpool Positivists) to the curator of the Williamson Gallery David Hillhouse. The notes of the interview say that Madame de Caluwé attended the Positivist Church.⁵⁰ There is no indication given of the dates of her membership. This is relevant since she continued to live in Liverpool until her death in 1925 and the Positivist Church existed there until well into the 1940's.⁵¹ Dr. Guercio was probably born in 1908 and would have only known Marian de Caluwé in the latter part of her life. It may be that she and her husband were drawn into the church through their artistic

contacts at the Pottery but some further evidence is needed to clarify this and the dates of their membership. This also includes some clarification on whether Emile her husband really was a member of that church. Dr. Guercio would never have personally met him given that Emile died in 1902.⁵² Emile was also a Catholic and he and Marian had been married in the Catholic Church but he would have felt very much at home in the Liverpool Positivist Church since this was in essence a Catholic Church with a Catholic liturgy but with the Goddess of Humanity replacing God.⁵³ In my discussions with two elderly surviving relatives about membership of the Positivist Church they were not aware that there had been any known connection in the family with the Positivists.⁵⁴ It was therefore not generally a family orientation. They did describe their great aunt as being very lonely and under financial constraints in the latter part of her life. Her father had died in 1900, followed by her husband in 1902. Note has already been made in a previous chapter that Marian did have four children but according to archive material at the Williamson Gallery only Sebastian was known of and then in the capacity of an only child. He was the youngest of the children and trained as an artist at the Laird School of Art in Birkenhead. Of her other children there is no mention or trace. Her great niece and nephew were not aware that she had any children at all and it was their father Otto Hawke Genn who registered her death. As to her finance, we know that Marian sold the 749 shares she owned to Mrs. Holt of the shipping family in 1905. The shares were valued at £1 each.⁵⁵ She would have inherited very little if anything from her father's will, since his estate amounted to only £253-8-6.⁵⁶ Marian's leanings towards Socialism and Suffragism are clearly ambiguous.

In this first section of the chapter I have looked at the predisposing factors which could lead towards active support for Socialism and Suffrage at the Della Robbia Pottery by some of the principal subjects of this thesis. Proclivity in its own right is not a sufficient argument for actual existence and therefore some empirical evidence is needed about the subjects to substantiate the title of this chapter. Harold Rathbone was an eccentric in many ways but at the same time he was a man hungry for recognition and attention not in the political world but in the art world. Involvement in Socialism or with Suffragism

could have served many purposes for him. Although his attitude to some of the younger and more naïve female members of the Della Robbia Pottery could be described at best as opportunistic, at the same time he encouraged them artistically and was genuinely concerned for their welfare. An example of this for instance was the episode concerning one of the young women Alice Louise Jones.⁵⁷ “Sometimes he would come to Mrs. Threfall (Alice Louise Jones) and say her work was below standard and she must be tired. He would then insist she took his season ticket and go to Llandudno, which was very nice but she had to go instantly, there and then.”⁵⁸ Alice usually had little money and struggled to pay for the price of a meal and dared not risk missing the return boat back since she had no money for an overnight stay. He married Alice Maud Cunningham a paintress in his pottery, a lady who was very much outside his social circle (her father owned a cycle shop in Liverpool)⁵⁹ From all accounts the marriage was not a happy one and she was often an embarrassment within the Rathbone circle. The evidence for Rathbone’s genuine support of Suffrage Movement was tenuous. However a chance report in one of the Suffrage Journals of a local society meeting gave me the evidence that Harold Rathbone was indeed active in the Movement. After the Della Robbia Pottery closed down in 1906 Harold who had been a frequent visitor to Llandudno set up a permanent home there.⁶⁰ (See illustration 18). *The Women’s Franchise* May 21st 1908 carried a report of the Llandudno Branch of the NUWSS meeting in which they had discussed the plans for the proposed National March in London. The report went on to say, “A beautiful banner design given by Mr. Harold Rathbone was displayed by the artist; a work committee was formed to carry it out, and a collection made towards materials.”⁶¹ At a meeting on 11th June 1908 the almost completed banner, showing both sides, was on view and was deemed to be most effective.⁶² There is no surviving picture or real description of the banner. The only pointer to the design is that it was bold and effective and that there were some leaks on it.⁶³ The banner was carried in the London March and later in the same year in the Manchester March. Harold’s cousins, Olga and Dorothy Briggs, also designed and made a banner, which was carried by the Manchester contingent in the London march.⁶⁴ This in itself did not seem to be dramatic proof of Harold’s practical involvement but

there was obviously some stronger evidence for this, based on the comments made by Peter Ellis Jones in an article he wrote on the Women's Suffrage Movement in Caernarvonshire in which he says:

Llandudno had grown rapidly as a seaside resort...and a high percentage of its population was English and not fettered by the constraints of Welsh nonconformity to the same degree as other parts of the country. Support for the movement in the town cut across party lines and encompassed a wide spectrum of local interests. Among its supporters were well known shopkeepers, businessmen and professionals, members of the town council, clergy of the Church of England and some nonconformist ministers to boot. Prominent amongst these pioneers was Harold Rathbone, a nephew of William Rathbone.⁶⁵

This further evidence was obtained by searching the local newspaper, the *Llandudno Advertiser* for the relevant years. The paper carried a report on a meeting in support of Women's Suffrage that was held in the town hall and addressed by Lady Frances Balfour. It listed those supporting her on the platform including Harold Rathbone.⁶⁶ A Dr. Goody proposed a resolution in favour of granting the parliamentary franchise to women on the same terms as men. The report continued:

Mr. Harold Rathbone in seconding, complained that the Press had not taken more notice of the Women's Franchise Movement until it had supplied them with "sensational" copy. He also referred to the attitude of his late uncle Mr. William Rathbone MP, who after the Midwifery Bill became law in a mutilated form declared it was high time that women had a much larger voice in their own affairs.⁶⁷

The newspaper report was the catalyst to a series of correspondence over the next few weeks between Harold and members of the public in which we learn of some of his personal political views. These letters partly explained Harold's stance on Suffragism but his views were distinctly clarified in letter he wrote to the *Llandudno Advertiser* in January 1910:

I also think the illiberal and tyrannical treatment of women, who have been rendered excessive and almost dangerous, by the curtailing of their sane rights

as British subjects, has been absolutely unworthy of the best liberal traditions of courtesy and common sense.⁶⁸

His stance on Socialism is less clear. Early in his entrepreneurial role at the pottery, Harold had been a high profile exhibitor at the Clarion Guild of Handicraft Exhibitions held in the early 1900's at Stafford, Chester, Manchester, London and Liverpool (see illustration 19).⁶⁹ The Clarion Guild of Handicraft was the brainchild of Julia Dawson the writer of the women's column in the socialist newspaper *The Clarion*. She had several aims. One was to educate the working classes to distinguish between good quality and shoddiness; another to provide craft classes with professional teachers and another to provide venues where these goods could be both advertised and sold.⁷⁰ She chose high profile companies known for their good working conditions, to exhibit alongside her Clarion members. Julia herself lived at Liscard not far from the Della Robbia Pottery. One can only conclude that in the early days of the rise of the kind of Socialism supported by William Morris and Walter Crane (Crane was closely associated with the Guild), Harold was not averse to himself and his pottery being linked with a known socialist organisation. This association is certainly not documented in any writings about the pottery but my evidence is based on searches through the weekly editions of the *Clarion* newspaper from 1900 to 1910. In fact Liverpool was one of the most active branches of the Guild both politically and artistically. As socialist policies changed and became more militant moving away from the ideology of revolution of society to reform through legislation, Harold may have withdrawn his support. This would explain his view of Socialism veering towards "undesirable tyrannous tendencies" that he wrote about in one of his letters to the *Llandudno Advertiser*.⁷¹ The other perspective might be that he seized whatever opportunities were available to advertise and further the interests of his pottery. Whatever his motives and whatever the political implications is clear that an aura of approval for Socialism and for Suffragism emanating from the owner would have left the workers free to express similar views and partake in associated activities.

It is now obvious that there could be other evidence to support my hypothesis about the political activities of workers at the Della Robbia. At the same time it is clear that evidence of actual membership of the Liverpool Suffrage Societies cannot be obtained through membership lists and the assumption from background alone is not enough to classify someone as a suffragist. There were hints obtained from the transcripts of the oral histories and from connections with known suffragists for me to feel that the Della Robbia did have more than one male supporter (Harold Rathbone) of the movement.⁷² This proved to be the case. A list of national committee members existed for the Artist Suffrage League one of whom was May H. Barker. She was on the committee from its inception in 1907 until her own death in 1912.⁷³ May was a well-known artist who worked in black and white and on relief and figure modelling. Some of her work was included in the 1901 Della Robbia Exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery and it is likely that she worked on commission for the pottery rather than fulltime. Nevertheless she obviously had a presence at the pottery.

Another well-known suffragist in Liverpool, previously mentioned in this chapter, was Mary Cox Palethorpe, a local artist. Her sister Fanny was also a suffragist. My research revealed that in the early 1900s Mary Palethorpe and Cassandra Walker had shared a studio (along with three other artists) in Colquitt Chambers in the centre of Liverpool. It is known that Mary was present at the Annual meeting of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society in December 1900 and that she later joined the more militant WSPU after a local branch was formed.⁷⁴ She assisted another Liverpool artist, David Jenkins, in making the banner that the Liverpool contingent carried in the 1911 march.⁷⁵ By this time though Cassandra Walker had left Liverpool to go and live abroad. The session's registers for the Art Sheds for the years 1901-2 also indicate that Fanny Palethorpe was in the same evening classes as Cassandra. This confirms that the two sisters who were militant suffragettes had at least in one case a strong link with Cassandra. It is reasonable to assume that the women would not have shared a studio if their ideological beliefs had been so apart. A letter written in the 1950s in the Williamson archives made a passing reference to the fact that Cassandra Walker was a suffragette.⁷⁶ The fact that

this was a passing reference to her affinity to the Suffrage Movement and no importance attached to it, underlines the way the emphasis on women's history has changed in the last twenty years. It does also raise important questions of why she left England to go and live abroad. This question was answered for me in an interview with her surviving great niece Miss Doreen Walker.⁷⁷ Doreen's father had related to her how Cassandra could not tolerate the way in which women were treated. She was a woman of independent ways and behaviour even in her dress. He described how she often wore a *jibb'a* (a long flowing Arabic cloak) when walking around Liverpool. There is one dichotomy regarding her support of Suffragism and that is her friendship with Ruth Bare. This friendship continued long after the pottery closed down.⁷⁸ Ruth's strong religious beliefs in the Positivist Church would have meant she would not have been an open supporter of the Suffrage Movement. Nevertheless the friendship was close and lasted for many years. There is also the possibility that Cassandra could have been influenced by factors extraneous to her Liverpool experiences. The period during which she attended the Westminster School of Art (1898-1899) coincided with one of the most exciting periods in the School's history. The principal was the dynamic Frederick Brown who had not only taught Robert Anning Bell but went on to teach Augustus John at the Slade School of Art. An atmosphere similar to that created by the Bloomsbury set must have pervaded the school. If all the evidence from the preceding paragraphs is put into context, then it points to the strong possibility that Cassandra Walker, one of the most important artists at the pottery, was also a supporter of the Women's Suffrage Movement. She was likely to have been a suffragist but not a suffragette (as inferred in the letter from Mr. Barnes to Mr. Robinson of the Victoria and Albert Museum) since she left England the year after a WSPU branch was formed in Liverpool and before it became overtly militant.

Marian de Caluwé poses the biggest problem in trying to determine whether she was a supporter of either Socialism or Suffragism. If she had been a member of the Positivist Church it would have been unlikely she would have gone against their teaching. She commenced work at the pottery as a married woman in 1900 and continued to work

until its closure in 1906. After her husband's death in 1901, financial circumstances dictated that she needed to continue to work and this would have been acceptable within the church. There are factors, which indicate even if she was not an open supporter of Women's Suffrage she certainly would have been in sympathy with the cause. Her Cornish relatives were not only supporters but her cousin Julia Hawke Genn was vice-president for many years of the Falmouth branch of National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.⁷⁹ (See illustration 20 of one of Marian's Cornish cousins). One of Marian's most famous works of art was a statue of Joan of Arc, the icon of the Suffrage Movement (now in Glasgow Art Gallery) which will be discussed later in the chapter. The evidence to determine whether Marian was an active supporter of Socialism or Suffragism is not conclusive. The motivation for the creation of the statue of Joan of Arc could clarify her position in relationship to the Suffrage Movement.

Ruth Bare has been established as a devout follower of Positivism and this would have precluded her from overt membership of the various suffrage societies. After her marriage she curtailed her art activities as would have been in keeping with her faith but never gave them up completely.⁸⁰ A few years after her marriage she and her husband Otto were treated harshly because of his German nationality. He was interned on the Isle of Man and Ruth and her children subjected to rigid surveillance and curtailment of their freedom during the 1914-18 war. The sinking of the *Lusitania* was also an excuse for many Liverpudlians to intimidate those with German sounding names.⁸¹ However if Suffragism was not a political arena for Ruth, then Socialism both from a personal and a religious perspective could well have been. A reference in the *Clarion* newspaper pointed to Ruth's allegiance to Socialism. There was a report of an exhibition, which was to take place in Liverpool on June 1908 in the Bluecoat School, and organised by "our friend and fellow craftsman Harold Bloomfield Bare". The report went on to say, "Also since this Exhibition of Arts and Crafts organised by Mr. Bare (whose clever daughter was one of our pioneer members, but who has since married a husband and cannot come)....."⁸² An early branch of the *Clarion* Guild of Handicraft had been established on the Wirral in 1902, where Ruth and the Bare family resided, and during

the same period Ruth was working at the Della Robbia Pottery. As a professional artist Ruth's role in the local guild would have been to help to train and advise other members of the guild. There was also a local branch of the Socialist Society in existence at Wallasey during this period. Further research work is needed to elaborate Ruth's participation in politics but this may become clearer in the next chapter of the thesis, which deals with Positivism.

The last principal subject Charles Collis is the person on whom there is most archival material available. None of this refers in any way to Socialism or Suffragism. I therefore have to conclude that he was not a high profile activist in the political field. Sadly politics was not an area which was discussed with him in the various interviews he took part in before he died. Given his ability to philosophise he would have at least had some important contribution to make towards the debate. In later life he was the church organist for his local Anglican Church and presumably had some affiliation to the said church.

I have talked about the key figures and their political affinities at the pottery but I have not undertaken a total survey of all the workers at the Della Robbia and it is therefore unclear how much support there actually was for the Suffrage or Socialist Movements. To emphasise this point mention should be made of one of the other female artists working there, Gwendoline Buckler. Gwendoline was the daughter of the Vicar of Bidston and many of the clergy on the Wirral were members of the Men's League for Women's Franchise.⁸³ This was the same Gwendoline who as a student at the Liverpool School of Art had campaigned successfully for nude life classes for women, indicating she felt strongly about equal opportunities for women. A letter from Julius Bare (Ruth's son) spoke of a Winnie at the pottery who admired the suffragettes.⁸⁴ There was no other female worker at the pottery whose name could have been Winnie apart from Gwendoline.

The premise of hidden Socialism and Suffragism at the Della Robbia Pottery has been analysed from a perspective of human involvement but brief mention of the art production of the pottery itself is essential to complete the whole picture. There are various sources for identifying the works of art produced by the pottery. The main source is the 1894 and the 1900 Della Robbia Company Catalogue. Further information is contained in the many reports in contemporary magazines like *The Studio* and the *Art Journal*. Current exhibits of the Della Robbia in our major national museums and pieces in private ownership add to this information. Combined together they give art historians an in depth knowledge of quality, style and subject matter of the ceramic production at Birkenhead. In addition individual marks both by the designers and the painters make attribution of the works straightforward. It should be recognised however that because of the freedom allowed in design and decoration (as long as it conformed to the general colour scheme and styles) there are many pieces in private ownership, which have not yet been included in cataloguing procedures.

Iconography has always been an intrinsic part of art history and the Suffrage cause in particular had many outstanding iconographic images. One of the most famous and one of the most pertinent to the Della Robbia Pottery is that of Joan of Arc. She personified for suffragists all that they were struggling for, as Tickner says, "She transcended the limitations of her sex and yet it was from the position of femininity - however unorthodox - that she posed a challenge to the English and to the men."⁸⁵ Her cult began to intensify in the 1880's and 1890's and it was during this period (1886) that Harold Rathbone painted his version of *Joan of Arc*.⁸⁶ One of Marian de Caluwé's most beautiful works is that of a statue of the same figure.⁸⁷ This was made between 1900 and 1904, modelled in white earthenware and glazed in white with added greens, browns and yellows. The figure is 76.3 centimetres high and depicts a standing figure of Joan in full armour (see illustration 21). Her face is shown looking ahead and her helmet placed by her feet. She carries the standard in her left hand supported by her right. Traditionally Joan carries the standard in her right hand and her sword in her left to show her non-aggressive ethos. This depiction of Joan bears no resemblance to the

oil painting by Harold Rathbone, which is of a scene in a chapel, of Joan and some children receiving communion and in the Pre-Raphaelite genre and when originally shown it carried the archetypal quote.⁸⁸ Traditionally the statue by Marian de Caluwé has always been seen in the context of a religious statue.⁸⁹ There were other statues by her that certainly fell into this category as for example the ones of St. Clare, Mary Magdalene and St. Joseph but there is a possible question mark over this one. Joan was not perceived as a saint at this time in history and was only canonised as such in 1920 (although Joan's cause for beatification had been taken up many years earlier by the French Catholic community) some 20 years after Marian designed and produced the statue. Marian's other religious statues are suitably pious in their mode whereas that of Joan is that of a woman preparing to go into battle. If this is taken in context with her family background of support for women's rights, then this work could well be seen as an example of suffrage iconography and demonstrate Marian's own support for the Movement. The alternative could be to see this as a Positivist icon. Joan of Arc was one of the few women acknowledged by Comte as a woman who had appropriately stepped out of her feminine role. Allowances were made for such women of exceptional ability in Comtean philosophy and Joan of Arc was therefore perceived as deserving special reverence from the followers of Positivism. The tendency to see all Marian de Caluwé's figures as religious figures emanates from her husband's ownership of the Monumental Masonry and Church Statuary Company, which amalgamated with the Della Robbia Pottery in 1900 and the inclusion of many such figures in the new catalogue.

There appeared to be an ethos of freedom at the pottery, which allowed the artists to depict their political or religious affiliations on their works of art, particularly that of Positivism. Mention has already been made of the clock case designed by Ruth Bare, which bore one of the Positivist mottoes and bears the date mark for 1904. Another was a Pompeian pot with Cassandra Walker's mark and also dated 1904. The little white pot with sparse small leaf painting, bore the Positivist motto *Il Buono e Buono ma il miglior Vince*.⁹⁰ Another vase in private ownership and not known to the Williamson Gallery bears the Flemish motto *Niets zendenty Arbyt*.⁹¹ This work has the initials of

Emily Margaret Wood another female employee of the pottery.⁹² There is no reason to think that Miss Wood spoke Flemish but Marian de Caluwé would have had some knowledge of the language.⁹³ The motto itself has no religious or political significance that I am aware of (*Nothing Without Hard Work*) but it does demonstrate the freedom of interchange of ideas amongst the potters and the opportunity to express them. A much more interesting work by Cassandra Walker is one entitled *Pandora*.⁹⁴ (See illustration 22). This is a wall plaque with a dark blue background and in white relief the head and shoulders of Pandora, releasing the contents of the *pythos* (the Greek urn). The traditional interpretation was that the contents of the *pythos* were all the evils that existed on the earth. The only thing left in the urn was hope. The fact that Cassandra Walker depicted an urn as opposed to a box makes it clear she was familiar with the original Greek myth and may have been making a feminist statement about male attribution of chaos in the world caused by females.

The examples I have given of Della Robbia works manifesting political affiliations are small in number. This paucity of numbers makes it difficult to come to any firm conclusions about the works of art being a reflection of the strength of support by the workers for any political movements. As yet there are many Della Robbia pieces, which are in private ownership and therefore unknown to museum curators or art historians. As these gradually come into the public domain they could add to this debate. It is an area of work for others.

There appears to be enough biographical evidence and some evidence from the works of art produced at the pottery to reflect “hidden” Socialism and Suffragism. Earlier in this chapter I posed the question; if there was evidence of Socialism or Suffragism at the Della Robbia Pottery how did it impact upon the lives of the male and female employees? The open support of the Suffrage Movement by Harold Rathbone has to be one of the most important facts in calculating how the movement impacted on the daily lives of his employees. Suffragism acknowledged “status” or the relative importance of women. The way women were treated at the pottery was a reflection of this “relative

importance.” The public comments made by Harold at the various suffrage meetings in Llandudno reveal his genuine perception of the capabilities of women as being on an equal level with those of men. His view of women as capable and intellectually equal to men allowed them to develop their artistic skills and professionalism on an equal footing with their male colleagues. In reality this meant that the works they produced were valued as being the works of artists rather than the works of women, which is what acquiring status is all about. In terms of semantics “status” was unnecessary for men because they were men. Hence the explanation why women exhibited their work and men did not. The women were also able, if so desired, to be suffragists themselves without fear of discrimination in the workplace. After the pottery closed down many of the women had enough faith in their abilities as artists to want to continue with their careers despite the difficulties they would encounter in finding alternative employment. Women like Violet Woodhouse continued to study art at the Liverpool School of Art and to exhibit at the Walker Art Gallery and the Royal Cambrian Academy right up to the 1930’s.⁹⁵ Cassandra Walker only won her craft scholarship after the Della Robbia Pottery closed down and she continued with her studies in England up to 1908 when she emigrated. (See illustration 23 of Cassandra and her husband in Canada). For men like Charles Collis the struggle to become the kind of artist he wanted to be was too great and he gave up. He later earned his living, albeit on the “breadline”, as an illustrator.

As far as Socialism was concerned there were two consequences. The first concerned working conditions. Harold’s support of socialism, notably through the Clarion Guild of Handicraft, was manifested in the working conditions at the pottery. Through his contact with Julia Dawson he would have been aware of the far-reaching effects of unemployment and also of sweatshop labour. These he tried to avoid, even putting his own capital into the business when it was failing. Fred Miller writing in the *Magazine of Art* commented on the factory conditions at the Della Robbia as compared to a normal pottery factory. The second consequence of Socialism was the ethos of helping others to develop their artistic skills in order that they could move out of poor working conditions

into better ones. This was through organisations like the Clarion Guild of Handicraft which both he and the workers of his company supported.

Generally the outcomes of the existence of Socialism and Suffragism at the Della Robbia Pottery in essence do not appear to be very dramatic. This is because they have both been taken out of context from the other influences at the pottery. If they are put back into the whole picture then their significance takes on their true importance. Without the ambience they created some of the other positive influences would have been unable to function. The Della Robbia Pottery was not the only studio pottery to have some involvement with Suffragism and Socialism. William Burton of Pilkington's Lanacastrian Pottery was a "zealous socialist" in his student days and he also entertained Mrs. Sylvia Pankhurst and other suffragettes at his home at Clifton Junction.⁹⁶ The correlation between studio potteries and Socialism and Suffragism seems to be a potentially rich area for further research.

Illustration 19. The Clarion Guild of Handicraft, *Clarion* (7th October 1904): 7

Illustration 20. Portrait of Miss Charlie Genn (Marian de Caluwé's cousin) illustrated in *Henry Scott Tuke* by David Wainwright and Catherine Dinn. Portrait mis-titled Lucy Genn.

Illustration 21. Della Robbia Statue *Joan of Arc* by Marian de Caluwé 1900-1904, unpublished catalogue, Glasgow City Art Gallery.

Illustration 22. Della Robbia Pottery blue and white panel *Pandora* by Cassandra Walker circa 1898, Wirral Museum Birkenhead.

Illustration 23. Black and white photograph of Cassandra West (née Walker) and her husband Sydney West in Canada circa 1918, in private ownership.

Notes Chapter Six

¹For further discussion of this see Walter Crane, *William Morris to Whistler* (London: G Bell and Sons Ltd, 1911), 96-97 in which Crane says, "its quiet methods (i.e. the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement) still serve indirectly the Propaganda of the Socialist ideal." A more contemporary discussion can be found in Lisa Tickner's book *The Spectacle of Women. Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 214-221.

²Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 13-14; Cherry, *Painting Women*, 70-71, 92-95.

³The actresses had their own suffrage organisation called the Actresses' Franchise League, founded in 1908 by Gertrude Elliot, Winifred Mayo and Sime Seruya of which there was a branch in Liverpool. Writers also had their own organisation the Women Writers Suffrage League.

⁴One example is Mary Seaton Watts wife of George Frederick Watts. Watts was one of the signatories to the Articles of Memorandum of the Della Robbia Pottery Company. Mary Watts refused Lord Leighton's request to sign an anti-female suffrage letter in 1899. See Watts, *The Annals of an Artist Life*, 2:145.

⁵Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 16.

⁶*Ibid.*, 18.

⁷*The Sandon Bulletin* 1 (1912-14) lists a Mary Lowndes at an address in Everton, Liverpool as a member of the Society.

⁸Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 20.

⁹Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Virago Press, 1978).

¹⁰Krista Cowman, *Engendering Citizenship: The Political Movement of Women on Merseyside 1890-1920*, D. Phil Thesis York University 1994; Marij Van Helmond, *Votes for Women: The Events on Merseyside 1870-1920* (Liverpool: National Galleries and Museums Merseyside, 1992). The first formal meeting of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society was 1894. The militant Women's Social and Political Union had formed a branch in Liverpool by October 1907.

¹¹She was imprisoned five times. The WSPU issued a postcard in her honour and *Votes for Women* in June 1909 devoted the front page of the journal to her release from prison.

¹²Ethel Hill and Olga Fenton-Shaffer, eds., *Great Suffragists and Why* (London: Henry J Drane Ltd., 1909). Nan Muspratt (Mrs. Egerton Stewart Brown) was the sister of Max Muspratt the first director of ICI, the chemical company and a shareholder in the Della Robbia Pottery Company.

¹³Mary Cox Palethorpe was active in the Suffrage campaign from 1900. She joined the WSPU and was arrested in the window smashing campaign of 1912 and imprisoned in Holloway along with her sister Fanny. Van Helmond, *Votes For Women*, 76.

¹⁴Mrs. E. Pollexfen donated £20 on July 30th 1908 and £10 on April 2nd 1909 as recorded in *Votes for Women* for those dates. Mrs. Pollexfen was probably a relative of a colleague of Cassandra Walker.

¹⁵The suffrage journal *Votes for Women* refers regularly to three members of the Sandon Society as being suffragists, Jessica Walker, Mary Cox Palethorpe and Constance Copeman. Van Helmond, *Votes for Women*, 75-76.

¹⁶See for example David Denver, *Elections and Voting Behaviour in Britain* (New York; London: Philip Allen, 1989), 24-28.

¹⁷See Chapter two footnote 24. The 1881 Census also lists a Charles Collis living in Birkenhead as aged two years.

¹⁸Uncatalogued *Reminiscences*, hand-written by Charles Collis in 1960's, Charles Collis File.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰The information comes from a taped interview with Gertrude Russell by Mr. Arthur of the Williamson Gallery on the 8th October 1970. The tape is missing but notes on the transcript are available.

²¹Interview given to David Hillhouse and Philip Mould in 1979 when John Fogo was in his eighties, John Fogo File.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Interview with Miss Collis, Charles' sister, by David Hillhouse 26th June 1981 at the Williamson Art Gallery.

²⁴This information comes from an unpublished essay *The Della Robbia Pottery* by Miss H. J Clarke of Birkenhead. It is based upon interviews with Charles Collis and is undated. Miss Clarke herself titles the work thesis but David Hillhouse describes it as an essay in his interim report.

²⁵Ibid. John Fogo as a potter earned approximately 10/- per week. Charles' brother William earned more looking after the horses at Lyon's Mineral works than Charles Collis did as a designer.

²⁶Charles Collis Papers Williamson Archives.

²⁷Information about this comes from a letter by Charles Collis to Mr. Hugh Jones in the Williamson Archives, Charles Collis File. The correct quote says "Two men look out through the same bars and one sees the mud and the other the stars" *A Cluster of Quiet Thoughts*, written in 1896 by Frederick Langbridge.

²⁸John Fogo related "the ladies worked for fun rather than money. Most of them came from rich families in Oxtun. The girls looked down on the men, they came from a different atmosphere." This may have been true for a minority of the women at the pottery but my research shows this was not true for all. John Fogo was in his eighties when interviewed and it is clear his memory was failing since he also described Harold Rathbone as having no children. Williamson archives, John Fogo Papers.

²⁹Charles Collis, interview in the *Liverpool Echo*, March 17th 1964.

³⁰Helen Williams, "Recollections of the Della Robbia Pottery. An interview with Mrs. Threfall," *Northern Ceramic Newsletter* 29 (March 1978): 6.

³¹I am grateful to Jean Headly at the West Yorkshire Archive Service who searched the Wakefield Charity Archives to find the answers to my questions. The information on names and occupations was abstracted from the Census Returns for 1851 and the Mormon International Genealogy Index.

³²Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths and 1891 Census.

³³Liverpool School of Art Minutes, 1st November 1894.

³⁴Kelly's Directory of Liverpool 1900 and 1901.

³⁵See Chapter three footnote 17.

³⁶Interview with Miss Walker Great niece at her home October 24th 2000.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Letter Books 30th November 1906, Liverpool School of Art; The Liverpool Education Minutes (1898/99), 43 said "The work submitted in the competition by another candidate Miss C. A. Walker, from the School of Architecture and Applied Arts, were so good that the Committee, on the strong recommendation of the examiners, made her a special grant of £20 to enable her to continue her studies which she is doing in London at the Westminster School of Art".

³⁹Probate Portfolio 1081, 16th May 1919.

⁴⁰Harold Bloomfield Bare's Obituary, *The Builder* 102 (26th January 1912).

⁴¹Information given to the writer in an interview with Ruth's granddaughter Clarrie Morrow and also noted by David Hillhouse.

⁴²Jon Rathbone, grandson of Edmund Rathbone (Harold's brother), a Liverpool Positivist has in his personal collection the transcripts of 5 volumes of uncatalogued letters between members of his family and other Positivists. Ruth and her parents are mentioned frequently in these letters. Letter dated January 13th 1884 vol. 5 from Elinor Crompton to Mrs. Carson "At Falkland Street we had a small gathering. Mr. and Mrs. Bare, Mrs. Hughes, etc."

⁴³James McGee, *A Crusade for Humanity: The History of Organized Positivism England* (London: Watts and Co., 1931), 200.

⁴⁴Terence Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Effect of Comtean Positivism on Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 259.6

⁴⁵Family Papers belonging to Mrs. Morrow granddaughter of Ruth Bare. The motto was "Progress is Our Aim."

⁴⁶*Women's Franchise* (October 15th 1908): 178; (October 22nd 1908): 191; (October 29th 1908): 203.

⁴⁷Ibid., (October 15th): 178

⁴⁸A book by H. D. Robert, *Paradise Street Chapel and Hope Street Church*, 1909, recorded J H Genn was a member in 1871 and *The Liverpool Unitarian Annual Report 1890-1900* showed he held various positions on the Church Committees up to 1891.

⁴⁹Hillhouse, *The Della Robbia Pottery*, Chapter 11, (pages unnumbered) no reference or source of information for this is given.

⁵⁰David Hillhouse met Dr. Guercio at the Gallery on September 4th 1979 in which mention is made of Madame de Caluwé's membership of the Positivist Church, Emile de Caluwé's death and Positivists and Art in Liverpool.

⁵¹Register of Births Marriages and Deaths.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid. The marriage took place at St. Philip Neri, Catherine Street Liverpool.

⁵⁴Interview with Pamela and John Hawke Genn at their home May 2000.

⁵⁵Records of the Della Robbia Pottery Company Limited PRO Kew.

⁵⁶Probate records show gross value of the estate was £253- 8-6d

⁵⁷The older women at the pottery always warned the new young women not to go back to Harold's studio for lessons. He also fathered a child of one of the young women employees but refused to marry her.

Alice Louisa Jones File, Williamson Museum and Art Gallery Archives.

⁵⁸Williams, *Northern Ceramic Newsletter*, 6.

⁵⁹Letter from Charles Collis to Don Richards 4th January 1966, Charles Collis Papers.

⁶⁰Harold also opened a studio where he continued to sell his Della Robbia Pottery. In the entrance hall of the studio hung a painting of his father and sister. This same painting was recently (2000 A.D) bought by the Williamson Art Gallery. *Llandudno Advertiser*, 14th August 1909. I am grateful to Tom Parry of the Llandudno Local History Society for forwarding this information to me.

⁶¹*Llandudno Advertiser*, 16th May 1908 also carried the report.

⁶²*The Women's Franchise* (June 11th 1908): 593.

⁶³*Llandudno Advertiser*, June 30th 1908, recounts the banner's journey to London "and several times a Welshman greeted the splendid Leek on the banner in the vernacular". The paper's edition of July 16th 1910 gives an account of the Manchester March and described how a small boy who saw the banner in the procession asked "give us an onion Mrs."

⁶⁴Alice Briggs, *Diaries of Alice Briggs*, 297. Alice says "June 27th a monster Suffrage procession in London. Olga designed and Dorothy worked a banner." A few months later Alice mentions a visit she and Olga made to Llandudno to stay with Harold and his family. Ibid., 298. I mention this to emphasise the family commitment to Suffragism.

⁶⁵Peter Ellis, "The Women's Suffrage Movement in Caernarfonshire," *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions* 48 (1987): 80.

⁶⁶*Llandudno Advertiser*, 13th November 1909.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸*Llandudno Advertiser*, 15th January 1910.

⁶⁹ The Clarion newspaper was founded by Robert Blatchford and went into production in December 1891. It sold for 1d and at it's peak had a readership of 83,000. It was conceived as a way of highlighting unjust social and political issues, which Socialism could help to eradicate.

⁷⁰Julia Dawson described her socialism unequivocally when she wrote; "We uncompromising Red Flag Socialists of whom I hope I am one." *The Clarion*, 4th March 1910. Walter Crane also commented on her socialist activities: "Only recently for instance, an exhibition was organised in London of the work of various Guilds of Handicraft, by a lady on the staff of a well-known Socialist weekly journal, which demonstrated on the one hand the joy in art and handicraft under happy and fair conditions for the worker and on the other showed the conditions of sweated labour, by living examples working at their miserable trades." Walter Crane, *William Morris to Whistler* (London: G Bell and Sons, 1911), 95-96.

⁷¹*Llandudno Advertiser*, 20th November 1909.

⁷²The notes of the transcripts and random notes sometimes undated and uncatalogued are in the Williamson Museum and Art Gallery Archives.

⁷³Her obituary read "The Artist Suffrage League has sustained a great loss by the sudden death of Mary H. Barker which took place in London on Thursday 25th July. Miss Barker has served the committee of the Artists' Suffrage League since its inception in 1907, and has been unfailing with help and co-operation in all the schemes of decoration and work undertaken from year to year." *The Common Cause* (1st August 1912): 294.

⁷⁴Van Helmond, *Votes for Women*, 76.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Letter from Mr. Brian J Barnes of the Williamson Gallery to Mr. Robinson at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 23rd June 1952, Williamson Art Gallery Archives.

⁷⁷Interview with Miss Doreen Walker October 2000.

⁷⁸A birthday book made and illustrated by Ruth Bare records Cassandra West's birthday and a note at the side refers to her as née Walker. The birthday book is in private ownership. She married Sidney West in 1914. Canadian National Archives.

⁷⁹A.J.R., *The Suffrage Annual and Who's Who* (London: Stanley Paul and Company, 1913). She was described, as having worked for Suffrage for many years, chiefly in connection with the Women's Liberal Association of Falmouth of which she was President and the Cornish Women's League of whose committee she was a member.

⁸⁰The Catalogues of the Walker Art Gallery exhibitions list her as exhibiting from 1909-1930 under her married name of Baier.

⁸¹See accounts of this in Pat O'Mara, *A Liverpool Slummy* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, 1995 originally published in 1933), 163-167

⁸²*Clarion*, 1st May 1908.

⁸³*Women's Franchise* (3rd December 1908): 278. "Last Monday evening Canon Kempthorne and Mr. Hugh Rathbone have consented to become vice presidents (of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage). Gwendoline's father died in 1902 in the West Indies before the Men's League was set up.

⁸⁴Letter from Julius Baier to David Hillhouse 17th December 1979, Williamson Archives.

⁸⁵Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 211.

⁸⁶Harold Rathbone's *Joan of Arc* is an oil painting on canvas and is signed and dated HSR '86. It was exhibited at various venues but eventually donated by the artist to the Walker Art Gallery Liverpool where it now hangs.

⁸⁷This statue is now permanently on display at Glasgow City Art Gallery.

⁸⁸The painting was exhibited along with the almost mandatory pre-Raphaelite type quote at the Cork Exhibition in 1902. The quote starts, "At earliest morn, when little children kneel, Into some wayward chapel she would steal."

⁸⁹For example the 1981 Catalogue of the Birkenhead Exhibition lists this statue under the heading "Amalgamation". It mentions the new dimensions of production brought by Emile de Caluwé's ecclesiastical statuary company.

^{90a}"The good is good, the better wins."

⁹¹Mr. and Mrs. Lee, antique dealers specialising in Arts and Crafts Ceramics sent me a photograph of this work.

⁹²Emily Margaret Wood was born in Calcutta and moved to the Wirral when she was 20 years old. She was a writer and illustrator of natural history and died aged 42 years old shortly after the pottery closed down.

⁹³Emile de Caluwé may have been French speaking but was from Belgium.

⁹⁴This is now in the new Wirral Museum Birkenhead. It was exhibited at the Spring Exhibition of the Walker Art Gallery in 1898 and illustrated in *The Studio* 12 (1898), 190.

⁹⁵Register of Students 1907, Liverpool School of Art; Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition Catalogues; Catalogues of the Royal Cambrian Academy.

⁹⁶Abraham Lomax, *Royal Lancastrian Pottery 1900-1938: Its Achievements and Its Makers* (Bolton: Lomax, 1957), 90. William Burton was a trained chemist and one of the most important men at the pottery

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Influences of Positivism on the Liverpool Art Community and its Connections with the Della Robbia Pottery

In the previous chapters periodic references were made to Positivism in the context of the Liverpool art community. This religious philosophy is relatively unheard of in modern society in contrast with that of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century when its impact was widespread. This notoriety was surprising given that the total membership of the movement in England probably never exceeded much more than one thousand in all of its hundred-year history. It is also surprising given that the movement both on the continent and in England was racked with internal squabbles and schisms. The explanation lies in the membership itself. Initially those who were affiliated to Positivism were to the forefront of the academic and liberal thinking societies in which they lived. In addition many of the leading academics and writers of the day, although not members of the movement, had some sympathy with its ideology. The prominence they gave to Positivism in their writings helped to enhance its profile because of the position they themselves held in the thinking world. This included men like John Stuart Mill and women like Harriet Martineau and George Eliot. The founders of the English movement were Richard Congreve a fellow of Wadham College Oxford and Edward Spencer Beesley, Professor of History at University College London. Local committee members were equally erudite like Benjamin Fossett Locke, a county court judge. Liverpool, although not famed for its academic aura, had one of the largest and most active Positivist communities in the country. Moreover this survived, albeit with reduced numbers, until just after the Second World War. The importance of the movement in the context of this thesis is the extent to which the Liverpool art community dominated the Liverpool Positivist Church. Moreover some of the same art community were also artists from the Della Robbia Pottery. An examination of the history, development and philosophy of the movement is therefore relevant to any assessment of the influences that affected the Della Robbia artists.

The Background History of the Positivist Movement

The Movement owes its origins to Auguste Comte, a Catholic, born in Montpellier in France in 1798. He suffered what could be described as a series of mental breakdowns during which period he developed his philosophy of Positivism. Essentially the summary of his thoughts was inscribed in two major works; *Positive Philosophy* and *Positive Polity* finally published in 1854. Significantly his marriage was a very unhappy one and after his wife eventually left him he fell in love with a married lady Clotilde de Vaux. She never allowed the friendship to become more than platonic. Clotilde died in 1845 just one year after Comte's devotion to her began. This infatuation for her became an obsession that translated itself into a form of worship, she becoming his Beatrice to his Dante. Significantly this perception of Clotilde was to form the basis of the role women were to assume in his philosophy and on which his Goddess of Humanity (a core belief in the Church) was modelled. In essence Comte's most important concept was the theory of human history and progress, this being an explanation for the development of human race. According to Comte this happened in three stages. The first was the Theological State, the second stage was the Metaphysical State and the third and final stage was the Positive State. Comte believed humanity had just entered into this final stage where men would be able to understand the scientific laws of nature and govern the world through the supreme truth found through those laws. He developed a framework into which these views could be formalised and within this framework the true believers in his philosophy ordered their lives.¹

Churches of Humanity were established in Newcastle, Birmingham, Leicester, Liverpool and two in London, although in the latter case, as a result of a schism between the London congregation. Of all these churches there is evidence to suggest that Liverpool was not only the strongest community but also the most independent. Two very clear indications of this are firstly the length of time that the Liverpool church continued to function. The first meetings took place in 1879 and continued without a gap until approximately 1940.² Secondly their financial status was different to the other churches. In the early years each branch made contributions to the headquarters in London and then submitted their requests for running costs. Records show that in 1894 Liverpool was no

longer making financial contributions to London and that they were obviously sustaining all their own costs.³ There are other factors concerning the organisation in Liverpool, which point to further evidence of this strong and independent character which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. These concern the church building and its architecture, the decoration inside the building and the liturgy practised by the congregation. These factors are all manifestations of the strength of the community but they are not explanations of what made the Liverpool branch so distinguished and indeed Positivist notorious in England. The explanation appears to lie in the teachings of Auguste Comte himself but in particular his teachings concerning the role of art in society and the role of social duty by the adherents to society.

Comte's Theory of Art.

Comte "made art an integral part of his system and attributed to it a leading role" in the formalisation of his new Positivist society.⁴ For Comte certain social conditions were necessary for art to flourish; namely that the relationship between artist, spectator and society had to be harmonious and stable. This interpretation of the function of art was very closely related to that of Ruskin, William Morris and the followers of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Ruskin himself grossly misunderstood Positivists' philosophy and accused them of propagating the use of machinery and all of its social conflicts and degradation for the artisan classes. According to McGee he accused Frederick Harrison, a leading member of the movement, "of teaching a gospel of steam engines and factories."⁵ He asserted that Harrison knew or cared little about art especially the great achievements of the past. Harrison strongly refuted these allegations but Ruskin, determined to have to have the last word, replied "that he did not write to my friend, as a "student" of Positivism, for I have no idea what Positivism means."⁶ Despite Ruskin's misunderstandings of Comte's philosophy, there is no doubt that they both had much in common in the way they thought. This in turn meant that to be a follower of William Morris would not have necessarily contravened the major teachings of Comte or Positivism. The artistic community in Liverpool, so deeply entrenched in Morris and his philosophy of life, were in many ways a ready audience for Positivism.

In trying to assess the influence of Comte's teachings on the Liverpool artistic community, one of the problems encountered is in trying to distinguish the true members of the church as opposed to those who periodically took part in the services so as to enjoy the socialising which followed. The socialising aspect was very significant. Malcom Quin head of the Newcastle Church of Humanity described what took place at Jane Style's house every week:

Every Thursday in her house, there was a sort of social meeting for Positivists and others - a gathering unique in my experience for its religious and intellectual atmosphere and for the high fraternal feelings, which entered into it.⁷

The composition of the society that went to make up the Positivist Churches is very important. William Simon in his book on European Positivism said, "The Positivist groups, as one would expect, were not an average cross section of the population either in England or in France". He was able to analyse the membership from archive material and found that in France there were fifty-one manual workers, forty-nine doctors, twenty-six civil servants, twenty-three army officers, twenty lawyers, seventeen engineers and twelve teachers.⁸ He did not provide a break down of the English membership other than to say the proportion of doctors in England was slightly smaller and the professional class was relatively prominent. In the case of Liverpool, reports of the actual size of the congregation vary from approximately seventy in 1883 (Elinor Crompton) to one hundred in 1930 (newspaper report on the death of Sydney Style) or to four hundred (Dr. Guercio).⁹ There is of course a difference from those claiming to be members and those attending as regular worshippers. This could be as little as fifteen on a Sunday service.¹⁰ I have been able to trace approximately ninety names in Liverpool so the true figure is likely to have been somewhere in the middle-range approximately 150 but these figures are based on membership over many years. They would not reflect the average attendance, which was low.¹¹ A breakdown of the membership details will demonstrate that this consisted of scientists, successful businessmen, architects and artists (see table 3). The analysis of the female membership shows a significant percentage of women also from artistic backgrounds.

Table 3. Table list of names of possible members of the Liverpool Positivist Church from 1883-1938

| Name | Comment | Name | Comment |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Mrs. Barton | | Paul Gaze | |
| Harold B. Bare | Architect | Miss Geddes | |
| Mrs. Harold B. Bare | | Mrs. Guercio | |
| Otto Baier | Medical Student | Mr. Leigh Henry | |
| Ruth Baier (Bare) | Artist | Mrs. Leigh Henry | |
| Adolphus Baier | | Emily Maud Irwin | |
| Clarri Baier | | Prof. Herford | Academic |
| Julius Baier | | Miss Hucknell | Ladies Companion |
| Sydney Baier | | Mrs. Hughes | |
| Mr. Blackham | | Miss A Jones | |
| Mrs. Blackham | | Mr. Charles Jones | |
| W T Bolton | | Mrs. C Jones | |
| Thomas Brennan | Mariner | Edmund Jones | Hotel Owner |
| Dr. Thomas Carson | Surgeon | Jennie Killen | |
| Mrs. Carson | | Mr. Killen | |
| Mr. Carter | | Mrs. Killen | |
| Edith Clark | | William Knight | Mersey Rail Co. |
| R Charlton | | Mr. Marples | |
| Mr. Coleman | | Mr. Nicholson | |
| Mrs. Coleman | | Mrs. Nicholson | |
| Mr. Collinson | | David Ramsey | Merchant ? |
| Miss Cox | Artist | Edmund Rathbone | Architect |
| Miss Cox | Artist | Grace Rathbone | |
| Grace Crawford | Provision Dealer | Edith Roberts | |
| Janet Crawford | Provision Dealer | Lucian Roberts | |
| Albert Crompton | Director Shipping C | Richard P Roberts | Engraver |
| Elinor Crompton | Musician | Tom Robertson | |
| Mrs. K Crompton | | Miss. Robertson | |
| Mary Crompton | Exhib. Walker A. G. | Mr. Fred Samples | Artist |
| Paul Crompton | | Mrs. Fred Samples | |
| Emile de Caluwé? | Della Robbia Owner | Betty Searle | |
| Marian de Caluwé ? | Artist | Phillip Shimmin ? | Grocer |
| Mr. Edgar | | Mr. C Smith | |
| Mr. Gray Edwards | | Mrs. C Smith | |
| Mrs. Gray Edwards | | Walter Sterry | |
| Mr. F Ellis | | Sydney Style | Solicitor |
| Mrs. Monica Ellis | | Jane Style | Artist |
| David Sydney Ellis | | Dora Sulman | Artist |
| Mr. Stanley English | Pottery Teacher | Thomas Sulman | Artist |
| Mrs. Stanley English | | Miss Swift | Hosier ? |
| Miss. A. Fairchilds | | Mrs. W Taylor | |
| Mrs. Falk | | John Taylor | |
| Abraham Fell | | Elizabeth Taylor | Music Teacher |
| Margaret Fitch | | Lily Taylor | |
| Enoch Fowler | Stonemason | Mary Thomas | |
| Elizabeth Fowler | | Annie Tomlinson | |
| John Fraser | Tobacco Company | Annie Watt | |
| Frederick Gaze | | Violet Wood | |
| Marie Gaze | | Francis Wright | Coal Merchant |

This structure had obviously changed dramatically by the 1930's if the newspaper report of Sydney Style's death is to be believed. This stated that "Most of the people who attend are of the working class families - people who have fallen away from the old religion. The war unsettled the beliefs of many and, since then the Temple has had a great increase in a the number of enquirers."¹² Of primary importance for this chapter is the membership directly or indirectly involved in the Della Robbia Pottery. The principal names associated with art in the Liverpool Church of Humanity who I have been able to trace with some certainty are: Edmund Rathbone and Harold Bloomfield Bare architects; Ruth Bare, Marian de Caluwé, Annie Smith (possibly the same Annie Smith who worked at the Pottery) and Stanley English ceramists; Jane Style, Thomas Sulman, Dora Sulman, Fred Samples, Tom Robertson, Miss Robertson and the Cox sisters, artists; Mary Crompton, amateur artist, Richard Price Roberts an engraver. There is also an unnamed artist who is described as having worshipped Jane Style from the distance when they were both art students at South Kensington. She subsequently became a close friend of Jane's and member of the Positivist Church.¹³ There are other names in Positivists' Archives that are the same as those names listed as artists in the Liverpool *Gore's Directories* for the relevant dates but there is no way of validating that they are the same people. Harold Rathbone and Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo attended soirees, social events and various services or meetings of the Church of Humanity but so far there is no evidence to suggest that they were practising members of the church.¹⁴ In addition there were artists or architects who received commissions from the congregation. These included Benjamin Creswick the sculptor, Ellen Mary Rope who worked on commission for the Della Robbia Pottery and the Church Crafts League and Arthur George Walker the Sculptor, also a member of the Church Crafts League. There were many other members of the Church who excelled in other creative disciplines as in the case of Elinor Crompton who was a noted musician and played the cello. A photograph of the Falkland Street Church, which was the one attended by Elinor prior to her death in 1885, shows very clearly, a cello placed in front of the organ.¹⁵ It is true to say therefore even with the limited evidence uncovered from documentation, that there was a substantial representation of the Liverpool art community in the local Positivist church.

The important question in this chapter concerns how membership of the church of Humanity and its Positivist philosophy impacted on the Liverpool artistic community and in consequence on those associated with the Della Robbia Pottery. One of the elements of Comte's teaching was his prescribed views on education, which were also applicable to art education. His early hostile experiences with the academic world led him to believe that academies should be abolished. He managed to incorporate this belief into a practical observance by ordaining that each Positivist member would receive nine sacraments (women seven) at specific points in their lives. Of these nine the first two were relevant to education. The first sacrament was that of *Presentation* administered during the first year of life and the second was *Imitation* administered at fourteen years of age. The educational consequences for children of these two sacraments meant that the child would remain entirely in his mother's charge from birth until fourteen. She would be responsible for teaching her children to read and write and pursue the arts between the ages of seven years and fourteen years. At the age of fourteen the child would receive the sacrament of *Imitation* and it is this sacrament of *Imitation* which theoretically affected artists. The young person would prepare for his future chosen occupation as an apprentice; in other words he would learn his skills in imitation from an adult. Scientific knowledge was an important requisite in the life of a Positivist and this would be pursued at evening classes. Girls would also have to follow the same pattern but this would be physically less demanding in that they would attend fewer evening classes. Comte strongly believed an apprenticeship was a far more beneficial approach to learning than to attend the academies. The child's education was further enhanced through contact with the other adult members of the church. Ruth Bare is the only professional artist from the Della Robbia Pottery of whom there is documentation to show that she was born into a Positivist family. There is substantial evidence to prove that the Bare family were already members of the Liverpool Church in the early 1880's (Ruth was born in 1880) and that the family were close friends of the widowed Albert Crompton. Albert Crompton (who had been a Positivist from 1872) went on to become head of the Liverpool Church in 1890. He had two daughters Mary and Grace. The much younger daughter Grace, was a friend of the young Ruth Bare and the two children spent a lot of time together.¹⁶ Grace's upbringing conformed strictly to Positivist teaching judging from the many letters

her father wrote to her.¹⁷ Ruth on the other hand, although left to her mother's care in accordance with church teachings, had a female influence that the motherless Grace missed out on. Mrs. Bare was a regular attendee and presumably committed member of her Church.¹⁸ An 1889 New Year's card drawn by Harold Bare and sent to John Fraser, another Positivist, clearly depicts the special relationship between mother and child (see illustration 24). The card depicts a mother and child sharing a basket of all that is good i.e. health, happiness and contentment. The model was clearly his wife based on private photographs of Mrs. Bare. (See illustration 25).¹⁹

Ruth was certainly privileged in her "education". Family letters of the Crompton's show that during a stay in London, Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo talked to Ruth about the finer points of architecture especially about St. Paul's and Gothic Architecture.²⁰ There is evidence that Mackmurdo was a regular visitor to Liverpool during the 1880's frequently staying at the Cromptons' Bedford Street house. So Ruth benefited from the contacts with the adults. Jane Style, an artist of some repute and member of the Liverpool church, ran a drawing and painting class in the Falkland Street Church that she initiated soon after it opened in 1883. These classes were for the "young folk" and ran for many years.²¹ Other members of the Positivist Church or supporters who mixed socially with Ruth were Edmund and Harold Rathbone and Jane Style.²² When Ruth was nine years old the Bare family emigrated to Philadelphia for a few years in order to improve Harold Bare's work opportunities. Ruth returned from America in 1894 just before her fourteenth birthday.

Fourteen we have seen was a critical year in educational terms for Positivists, in that it was the time for the sacrament of Imitation, which in educational terms manifested itself as a form of apprenticeship. It is not clear when Ruth joined the Della Robbia Pottery but it is possible that it was soon after and that she followed the apprentice scheme that loosely existed at the pottery. The earliest of her dated work at the Della Robbia is 1898 and she continued to work there until 1904. She was also enrolled for some day and evening classes at the Art Sheds during the years 1901-3 while employed at the Birkenhead Pottery. Attendance at these classes might indicate some dichotomy concerning Positivist beliefs on education, even more so in the context that her father also

attended some of these classes. However the explanation for the freer interpretation of the doctrines of Positivism by the Liverpool Community becomes clearer later in this chapter. I can make no other connections with artists at the church of Humanity who were members as children.

Of the adult members Edmund Rathbone had been brought up as a Unitarian and qualified as an architect as did Harold Bloomfield Bare. Professions such as architects, lawyers and doctors were recognised by Positivists as professions which required a formal training outside of their church. If the Annie Smith who was a member of the Positivist community was the same Annie Smith who worked at the Pottery from 1895, then she also attended evening antique classes at the Art Sheds from 1901-2. Nothing else is known about her education. Jane Style (1853-1938) is perhaps the most interesting and talented of all the artists with Positivist connections. She came from an academically successful family, one brother being Benjamin Fossett Locke the county court judge, the other Walter Locke professor of Theology at Oxford. As a young girl she showed aptitude and desire for artistic work and she subsequently gained a place at South Kensington School of Art where it appears she made progress. In the address given at her death by Otto Baier we learn some of the conflicts that can arise for a "convert" to Positivism. Her brother Fossett had become a follower of Comte's doctrine and he conveyed his apprehensive feelings to her about the process of art education.

He wrote about this to his sister in very measured terms, anxious not to offend by going against tradition of family and education. Janet up to then had been a very serious Christian had probed her mind and wondered whether her life's duty lay in the mission-field. But reason triumphed over sentiment and tradition, and the young art student too became a convert to Positivism.²³

Jane married Sidney Style in 1878 but the year previously she had spent with a girl cousin studying under the famous painter Liezen-Mayer in Munich.²⁴ She went on to produce some very fine works of art more of which will be discussed later.

Apart from the right kind of education, for Positivists for art to flourish the right social

conditions also had to be in place, namely that artist, spectator and society had to be in harmony and stable. In reality this meant that there had to be some form of social justice and it was an objective the Positivists tried to achieve. Ruth Bare we know from the previous chapter was a founder member of the Clarion Guild of Handicraft which was a socialist organisation committed to achieving some equality in social conditions for the working classes. In the case of the Guild this was through art and decorative art teaching. Jane Style who had been a close contact of the young Ruth, was a tireless campaigner in the fight for social justice. She tried to bring this about in many ways in Liverpool. One of these was to give art lessons to some of the boys that her husband had befriended in the Greenland Street Club when they first came to live in Liverpool. She used her art to depict the appalling conditions which existed in this busy port, in a painting which received a lot of publicity when it was first exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery. The painting entitled *A Liverpool Doorstep* showed ragged destitute children. Unlike many artists who depict poverty and then forget about it once their painting is finished, she stayed in contact with some of the children in an attempt to improve their lives. One of the outcomes arising out of this contact with the poverty of so many families was the setting up of her Needlewomen's Guild. This was a kind of a precursor of a Trade Union.²⁵ Jane was able to visit some of these socially deprived areas because another Positivist, John Fraser, was prepared to escort her into areas which for a lady of her class were deemed to be too dangerous.

Another prescriptive aspect of prescribed Positivist belief which particularly affected women artists was the rule that dictated that women should give up employment on marriage to concentrate on their primary role of teachers of Humanity to their children. For obvious reasons males continued with their chosen professions. From all accounts Ruth Bare complied with this ruling on her marriage to Otto Baier in 1907. She was actively involved in the Clarion Guild of Handicrafts but did not seem to take an active part after her marriage. She had four sons but obviously never gave up her interest in art, exhibiting at the 1911 Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition under her married name of Baier. She also maintained her interest in furniture design throughout her life. Marianne de Caluwé worked both as a married woman at the pottery and as a widow. By the time

the pottery closed down she would have been aged fifty-nine and presumably not in a position to take up paid employment elsewhere. Records show she continued with her art interest exhibiting at the Autumn Exhibition in 1910. If she and her husband were members of the Positivist Church they did not have a high profile presence there and apart from Dr. Guercio's evidence there is nothing further known about their membership of the church.

One of the married couples who had strong connections to the Liverpool Temple of Humanity (this was the name given to the Positivist Church) was Thomas and Dora Sulman. They too were artists. Dora specialised in animal painting. Her husband Thomas Sulman was well known in art circles being one of the illustrators for the *London Illustrated News* and an engraver. He was born in 1832 and became a Positivist in the late 1860's.²⁶ A letter of condolence written from Dora to Otto Baier on Jane Style's death makes it clear that she and Ruth Bare (Baier) were sufficiently close to spend time visiting each other. Dora Sulman was at that time living in Wembley in Middlesex.

Jane Style, a staunch follower of her religion, "conformed" to her Church's teaching in not taking up paid employment after her marriage to Sydney Style. Jane could be perceived in some ways as having the best of both worlds. She led a very active and in many ways fulfilling life continuing to use her talents both artistically and intellectually. She was fortunate that her husband Sydney was a solicitor in a local firm and their income meant that work was not necessary for her. The couple did not have any children although they subsequently adopted a brother and sister whose care they had been requested to take on under tragic circumstances.²⁷

The whole area of women's role in Positivists society is often manifested under the banner of their opposition to female suffrage. Jane Style wrote a book on women, which showed a high degree of realism about the world in which she lived.²⁸ Wright in his book on Positivism went so far as to say about her book that "the 20th Century should have listened and thereby averted the First World War."²⁹ Her realism was also compassionate; she wrote "The prostitute whose object is to support a dying mother or starving child may

be more worthy of respect than the virtuous woman who is lacking in tenderness”.³⁰ She emphasised that there was a strong role in Positivism for women if they so chose. “All work will be open to women - she will be free to choose any public career; but if she choose the lot of wife and mother, the realization that this is the highest and most difficult work will make her desire to devote herself to her sacred task.”³¹ The book is full of sound logic.

To summarise then, Comte’s teachings on education, socialism and the role of women in society did not appear to place unduly excessive restraints on either women or their progress in art. The possible explanation for the Liverpool membership’s rather free interpretation of Comte’s doctrines appears to arise out of the fact that their community was so heavily dominated by the arts. Art communities have a reputation for their independence of mind and spirit and the Liverpool followers of Comte were no different to other artistic communities in this respect, music, literature, art and architecture being so well represented. The fact that the Comtean Church relied very heavily on the form of the Catholic Church both in its structures and the outward depiction presented the membership with the opportunity to put into practice their artistic skills both in the liturgy and the physical surroundings. In fact the writer of an article on the church in the *Liverpool Review* said, “It was supposed to beat Romanism out of the field and its ceremonial would make a ritualist turn green with envy.”³² This stance was further reinforced in that members of the Temple of Humanity in Liverpool followed the leadership of Congrève rather than Frederic Harrison after the London Schism of 1887-88. Congrève placed a greater emphasis on Positivism being a religion rather than a philosophy or political movement as Harrison did.³³ The practical results of this were a great emphasis in Liverpool on the Temple of Humanity itself needing to be a place of beauty. The architecture of the church itself, its contents and furnishings were to be an artistic backdrop in which a dramatic and musical form of liturgy could take place.

The architectural history of the places of worship, which were used by the Liverpool community, reflect this attitude and was given added impetus by the fact that the membership contained some well respected architects. Informal meetings and services

were first held in 1880 in temporary premises belonging to the veteran Chartist Edmund Jones at his Temperance Hotel at 179 Islington Liverpool. These premises were far from ideal.³⁴ When Edmund Jones died in 1882 the need for alternative premises arose. These were found in some converted stables in Falkland Street. The members of the congregation set about decorating them to reflect the needs of the congregation and for the liturgy, which they were to practise there. The Church was opened on the 1st January 1883.

Mrs. Style added with her own deft hand the artistic finish to the place of worship. Soon the small hall outwardly so little attractive, became within a shrine of harmonised beauty which could not but impress the most critical. Some of us will never forget the day when this beauty first dawned on us.³⁵

The anonymous writer of the article in the *Liverpool Review* not only gave a descriptive account of the interior but he managed to convey some of the atmosphere as well:

The small brick building is plain outside, but it is a delightful little snugery inside. The walls are covered in terracotta; the roof represents the sun, moon and stars in blue and gold, while various panels overhead are filled with words of everlasting significance such as "truth" and "love". Round the wall high up, are ranged the busts of 13 great men, all in a row, (there are 13 hymns in their book) with one extra placed a little lower down, as though there was a love for an unlucky number amongst these people. On the western side of the room, opposite the entrance, was a raised platform, very small, with several reading desks, while a yellowish kind of curtain against the western wall was brought out so as to form a small retiring room close to one of the desks. Standing against this sombre curtain was a tall golden canopy, made probably of wood. Under this stood the life size figure of a woman with a child in her arms, and before these terracotta figures, burn two candles..... The room was well lighted and warm, cosy and bright.³⁶

The writer went on to say that there were chairs set out for approximately sixty people and that "the audience and performers all told, amounted to about 25 people." (See illustration 26). Hymns were sung, the organ played and a reader addressed words to the terracotta statue. Some of the prayers were chanted in Italian and readings were taken from Hebrew scripture and Wordsworth.³⁷ This article encapsulated many poignant facts about the Liverpool Positivists concerning both their liturgy and the size of their congregation. There is also a detailed description of the Liverpool Chapel by Malcom

Quin based on his own visit there, which explains more of the significance of the art and sculpture in the chapel. In particular he describes the statue and a painting by Jane Style. The painting was placed in the chapel sometime after the visit from the writer of the article in the *Liverpool Review*:

In chief place, at the front of the platform they set up a life-sized statue of Humanity in the form of a woman aged about 30 with a child in her arms and around the walls they placed busts of the men represented by 13 months of the Positivist calendar. They also placed in the room an oil painting by Mrs. Style This large and richly coloured production entitled *Magna est vis Humanitatis* is in fact a religious epic on canvas. The central figure in the picture is Humanity, typified by a mother blessing her 3 children, the white, the yellow and black races. In the foreground at her feet are priests of the different historic religions of the world worshipping at their own altars, which taken together constitute the altar of Humanity. A setting sun in the background suggests the older faiths are loosing their power over the lives of men.³⁸

Jane Style's large canvas was hung in the church in 1889 some years after the church opened and is now at *Maison August Comte* in Paris. Quin alluded to the statement that Jane was making about racialism on which she had strong views, which she was later to express in her book.³⁹ In reality a photograph of the interior of Falkland Street depicts a crowded room with rows of simple country chairs.⁴⁰ So given the artistic and architectural membership of the Church, in particular Edmund Rathbone and Harold Bloomfield Bare, it does become apparent that the converted stables was a building that they would find inappropriate for their liturgy. Above all it would have been rather small for what was the peak period of their membership. This has to be taken in the context that liturgical worship was more important for this branch of the church than practising the rules of Comte's philosophy that underpinned the religion. Wright defined the congregations of both Newcastle and Liverpool as "Men and women with powerful religious needs which orthodox Christianity failed to meet"⁴¹

Albert Crompton had acquired a site in Upper Parliament Street within view of the new Anglican Cathedral before he died in 1908. His daughter Mary appears to have inherited sufficient money to help finance a new church and its decorations.⁴² In addition Crompton's successor as head of the Liverpool Church was Jane Style's husband Sydney.

Given his own natural interest in art coupled with his wife's passion and talent it would have been unnatural for the artistic element of the new building not to have been of paramount importance.⁴³ Neither of the two architects belonging to the Church drew up the plans for the new building. Why this was so I am not clear. One explanation could be that large public buildings were not within their architectural experience or expertise. In Bloomfield Bare's case he had been in partnership with several local Liverpool firms including that of Henry Langton Beckwith. It is however the great brass doors of the Liverpool Philharmonic Public House that he is best remembered for rather than any major building design. He may have felt in 1910 he was now too old or not in sufficient health to take on such a project. Harold Bloomfield Bare died in January 1912. In Edmund Rathbone's case he had been in partnership with Mackmurdo for some years (this was dissolved in 1890) and then subsequently with Edmund Ware.⁴⁴ Edmund Ware was a member of the governing council of the Della Robbia Pottery and a shareholder. The latter partnership had been responsible for the design and building of the Unitarian Church at Manor Road in Wallasey. This church was the epitome of an Arts and Craft building. It contained works from the Della Robbia Pottery, sculpture by Benjamin Creswick of the Century Guild and Church Crafts League, painting by Bernard Sleight of the Bromsgrove Guild of Arts and Crafts and metal work by Walter Gilbert also of the Bromsgrove Guild of Crafts. This church was completed in 1899. Edmund suffered from mental health problems and by 1910 it may well have been that he did not feel confident enough to design the new Church of Humanity himself. His own instability is somewhat reflected in a work he wrote on *Humanity and Art*.⁴⁵ It depicts a wandering and somewhat confused mind whose arguments sometimes made little sense. He eventually committed suicide in 1924. Edmund therefore commissioned plans from Charles Reilly who at that time was head of the Liverpool University School of Architecture. These plans were illustrated in *The Builder* (see illustration 27) on the 5th May 1911 and described as follows:

....Shows a sketch scheme for the Liverpool Positivists on a fine site they possess overlooking the new Cathedral. The main idea of the plan is one dome should represent the old religions of the world and the other the new religion of Humanity. The light is concentrated under either dome and connecting them is a

darkened transept. A raised ambulatory encircles the Church, from which in their correct order lead the side chapels. Under the final apse and raised on a high pedestal to dominate the whole building is a colossal figure of Humanity, symbolised by a woman and child. The estimated cost of the building is £20,000.⁴⁶

The report went on to say that these drawings had been sent to the Royal Academy Exhibition that year but were "crowded out".⁴⁷ The plans reflected the Positivist beliefs and their liturgy as for example in the side chapels, which were to be devoted to the 13 great examples of Humanity as defined by Comte, like Dante and Descartes. The description of the statue of Humanity as "colossal" reflects the importance of the female goddess of Humanity and I will return to this later in the chapter. The plans depict a very large classical building with predominantly Greek Revival decoration but more on the scale of a grand cathedral. Joseph Sharples commented in the Catalogue of the 1997 Liverpool Exhibition of Charles Reilly's work that "the design is essentially an elaboration of St. Barnabas's with rich Greek Revival detailing."⁴⁸ The Church of Saint Barnabas in Shacklewell Lane London was built for the Merchant Taylor's School Mission and designed by Reilly. Edmund Rathbone gave an insight on Reilly's design in an article that he wrote in the *Architectural Review* in which he said:

The church is a small one, (*Falkland Street that is*) and on occasions it is overcrowded; hence the idea of building a new one has suggested itself as desirable. A site is available, being the property of some of the members, one or two whom are rumoured to have the necessary means to erect a church, were they sufficiently tempted to do so by a judicious scheme. Having this in mind, the writer was attracted by some photographs (published by the *Architectural Review* for September last) of the church of St. Barnabas, Shacklewell Lane, London, N.E., erected from the designs of Professor Reilly.⁴⁹

The cost probably determined why the building was never carried out. By this time the congregation, although at its peak, could not have been much more than one hundred regular and committed members. Mary Crompton's wealth might certainly have sustained a commitment of that size but the small congregation may have deemed it inappropriate to worship in such a vast building.⁵⁰ Another architect W. H. Ansell (a member of the Art Workers Guild) drew up a more modest design and the church was opened in December 1913.

The interior of this new building reflected the artistic culture of the congregation, as did the old Falkland Street one. There are several descriptions of the interior of the church. The most prominent feature as it was meant to be, was the statue of Humanity "radiant in its pillared shrine".⁵¹ Malcom Quin the head of the Newcastle Church was not so impressed with this building and its contents. His ideal building was more in keeping with one suitable for services in the Catholic rite and all its splendour.⁵² He described it as having "meagre half-moon windows, high up and affording inadequate light." Contemporary and modern descriptions also mention the simple relief of "Mother and Child on the outer wall of the church, in a niche facing the street. The building still exists and is used by the Third Church of Christ Scientist but the niche is now empty. The new church did however have a large basement hall, which was for the use of social gatherings and dramatic plays, so much enjoyed by this congregation. Sadly the opening of the new church was marred by the murder of its benefactor, Mary Crompton, on the evening of Tuesday 7th October 1913, some months previously.⁵³

The depictions of the Goddess of Humanity are crucial in the Positivists' Churches in that they symbolise the core beliefs of the Church. This aspect does relate back to a certain extent to Comte's personal relationship with Clothilde de Vaux but there had to be a symbolic way of expressing "Humanity". It was Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* that was taken up as this symbol. Raphael painted the *Sistine Madonna* between 1512 and 1513.⁵⁴ The painting was a political gift from Pope Julius II to the Convent of *San Sisto* in Piacenza as a reward for supporting him in his struggles to retain power. Significantly Piacenza was a small independent community. Traditionally this painting, along with the *Madonna della Sedia*, is interpreted as a Madonna who is both a public and divine figure. She is depicted amongst a cloud of angels signifying the divine aspect. The public aspect is implied in the fact that both the Virgin and the Child look out directly at the spectator. Raphael's other Madonnas are more distant and remote in their stance. Although Raphael's Madonna is a public and divine woman she is unmistakably a caring and proud mother, a confident woman, one whose beauty and compassion exude from the painting - the same attributes and role allocated to Positivist women. It is therefore not surprising

that this was the image chosen to represent Humanity. In Liverpool there was a long established tradition of devotion to the Virgin Mother dating from the time that Thomas Carson had instituted her festival in 1885. In John Fraser's *Collection of Positivist Ephemera* the rubrics of the liturgy are clearly set out for this festival. The most elaborate celebration was in 1909 under Sydney Style's leadership.⁵⁵ The service also encompassed the singing of the *Magnificat*, of the *Nunc Dimittis* and Meditations on Mary.⁵⁶

Liverpool's depictions of the Goddess of Humanity are interesting in two ways. One from the critical perspective of the art itself and the other from sense of the way the Liverpool artistic community interacted with the wider national figures and artistic organisations. These organisations included the Century Guild and the Church Crafts League as well as regional groups such as the Birmingham Guild of Handicrafts and the Bromsgrove Guild. The first known statue of the Goddess of Humanity in Liverpool was the one created for the Falkland Street Church by the sculptor Benjamin Creswick and which was put in place in 1885. The year is significant in that it is also the year that Thomas Carson initiated the Festival of the Virgin Mother. Presumably the statue had been commissioned to coincide with the inauguration of the feast day which according to Malcom Quin's *Memoirs* was celebrated on August 15th an important date in the Catholic calendar, being the day on which the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated. There is very little biographical information available on the sculptor of the first statue of *Humanity*, Benjamin Creswick. What is available links him to both Liverpool and the Della Robbia Pottery. It is known from Ruskin's own memoirs how Creswick, a grinder in the Sheffield cutlery industry rose to become a reputable sculptor and head of modelling at the Birmingham School of Art.⁵⁷ Creswick subsequently became a member of Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo's Century Guild.⁵⁸ Mackmurdo was another of Ruskin's protégés.

Mackmurdo had many connections with the artistic community of the Liverpool Church of Humanity. The probable explanation for this is that sometime in 1881 he was chosen as the architect to design a seaside home for Albert Crompton. This was Sandhill Cottage at Formby Point just outside Liverpool. How he acquired the commission in the first place can only be surmised. This could have been through the Ruskin connection since Ruskin

had personal connections with Harold and other Rathbone family members. Harold and Edmund were also frequent visitors to the Crompton's home; Edmund subsequently married Crompton's daughter Grace at the Church of Humanity. The cottage was completed in 1882 the same year Mackmurdo inaugurated his Century Guild of which Edmund Rathbone became the representative of the northern branch. There is no evidence that Mackmurdo was involved with the Positivists prior to Crompton's commission. There are many more references to his visits, which were clearly social as well as professional. It is therefore conceivable that Mackmurdo was introduced to the Positivists through Edmund Rathbone. How committed he was to Positivism is very unclear. His interest obviously continued for some years after the completion of the house in Formby because records of the London Positivist Church indicate that he gave two lectures to the members on Art in January 1884.⁵⁹

There is also evidence that Creswick's statue of *Humanity* was actually created in Mackmurdo's studio. While on a visit to London Elinor Crompton wrote to her elder daughter Mary:

Today we go to Mackmurdo's studio, I shall write and tell you about it.....This is written after being at Mackmurdo's. Will you tell father we saw him and he is coming to Liverpool on Saturday so the spare room will have to be got ready. I said I would write and tell father and so spare Mr. Mackmurdo the trouble. Mr. Creswick was not there and so the figure is not quite ready for me to see it. I am to go next week⁶⁰.

The following week Elinor recounts in a letter to her husband Albert Crompton, "My mother wants to go with me to Mr. Mackmurdo's studio. I hope she will like the figure of Humanity"⁶¹ This one statue therefore provides links between the Liverpool Positivists and with the Century Guild. It also offers an explanation of the route that Creswick took to working with Edmund Rathbone later on the Unitarian Church in Wallasey and most importantly later with the Della Robbia Pottery. Creswick is described in the 1900's Della Robbia Pottery Catalogue as a "modeller". His *Merry Drinkers* was included in the 1906 closing down sale of the pottery.⁶² The link with Birmingham and the Bromsgrove Guild

is also explained in that Frederick Rathbone married the sister (Kate) of Arthur Dixon director of the Birmingham Guild of Handicrafts. In all a paradigm in explaining how nineteenth century art and commissions were both intertwined with and dependent on personal connections.

The second statue commissioned by the Liverpool Positivists was a life size depiction of the Goddess of Humanity again based on Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*. The existing statue in Falkland Street was probably not considered suitable for the grander church planned as Edmund Rathbone implied in his article in the *Architectural Review*. "In the existing church an image of the Virgin and Child by Benjamin Creswick represents as best it can the tenderness and responsibility which are the essentials of her existence."⁶³ The importance of the statue of *Humanity* can be gauged from its very substantial inclusion in Charles Reilly's original architectural drawings for the proposed new Church in Upper Parliament Street. Although these elaborate plans were not carried out, a commission for the statue was given to Arthur George Walker a member of the Church Crafts League. The provenance of this statue is well documented in that an illustration of it appeared in the *Church Crafts League Catalogue* of 1920 as an example of the League's work. The image also appears on various post cards published of the Church. A direct descendant of Ruth Bare also owns a contemporary oil painting of the statue in situ. The statue remained in the Church of Humanity until the church closed in 1947 when it was then placed in the Liverpool Women's Hospital. This also closed in 1981 and the *Goddess of Humanity* then went missing. It was last heard of in a mother and baby Home in Woolton that also closed in 1992. (See illustration 28). The statue's whereabouts is currently unknown.

Again it is worth mentioning the personal connections with the Church Crafts League and Liverpool. Lee Stirling Cooper founded the Church Crafts League in December 1899 with the aim of diffusing new life into church buildings. (The same Lee Stirling Cooper had been commissioned by Philip Rathbone to complete the panels on the exterior walls of St George's Hall in 1893 in Liverpool) One of those he chose to work with him was Conrad Dressler one of the founding directors of the Della Robbia Pottery. Another

member of the League was Ellen Mary Rope also a sculptor who worked on commission at the Della Robbia Pottery.

The history of a *Statue of Humanity* in Liverpool is not confined to the churches. Edmund Rathbone commissioned the same image of the *Sistine Madonna* for the *Wayside Café*, which he owned. The café was situated in Cook Street in Liverpool. Edmund commissioned the statue from the Della Robbia Pottery through his brother Harold. Unfortunately the statue no longer exists; it was believed to have been destroyed when a bomb hit the café during the Second World War. There are however two sources of information concerning the statue. The first is an account of its production at the pottery narrated by Gertrude Russell one of the lady artist at the pottery.⁶⁴ In describing the way Rathbone treated Manzoni (Head of the architectural department) she says:

When a statue of the Madonna, made in Manzoni's department, came to be fired, Rathbone insisted against advice that it be fired in one piece, and it split from top to bottom. It was a special order, and Manzoni had the job of patching it up. However the customer accepted it and it stood in the doorway of the *Wayfarer's Café* in Cook Street until blitzed in the Second World War. Rathbone delivered the statue in a handcart over the ferry.

The second account comes from an article on *City Cafés* published in the Liverpool University students' magazine *The Sphinx*.⁶⁵ (See illustration 29). The article discusses the artistic and commercial composition in Liverpool in terms of "Greek" and "Jew", Greek being the artistic and Jew the commercial. The Wayside Café is seen as a "Greek Nirvana" guarded by Pluto in his "pince-nez".⁶⁶ (See illustration 30). The account makes clear that this was a place to discuss culture and not business. The report gives a detailed description of the interior and its contents including books on art, religion and philosophy. It does not describe or mention the statue but the article is accompanied by a line drawing of the Sistine Madonna.⁶⁷ Other contemporary reports confirm it was a well-known venue of the artistic and literary community.⁶⁸

Thus we have three well-documented images of the Goddess of Humanity one in terracotta, one in Marble and one in the faience ware produced by the Della Robbia

Pottery. There is the possibility that there was a fourth statue, again of the Sistine Madonna. A photograph taken in 1900 of Edmund Rathbone's drawing room in his house in Hope Street Liverpool clearly depicts a statue of the *Goddess of Humanity* on a table.⁶⁹ This is unlikely to have been Creswick's statue from Falkland Street since that was in situ from 1885 until the new church opened in 1913. It could not have been Walker's statue since this was not made until 1913. Nor could it have been the one from the Della Robbia Pottery, which was also made after 1900, when the photograph was taken. Gertrude Russell who described Manzoni making the statue did not join the pottery until 1903.

Positivism as a philosophical experience is a fascinating subject in its own right but at the beginning of this chapter the question was raised on its significance as far as the Della Robbia Pottery was concerned and for those who worked there. The significance seems to centre on the actual teachings of Positivism that encompassed education, women's place in society, social order and most significantly the importance that art played in trying to fulfil these functions. The numbers of those at the pottery do not have to be high but they need to be of sufficient standing to affect the whole. We have seen that Harold Rathbone appears to have been one of the people who attended some services, social gatherings and some of the lectures without being a committed member. (See illustration 31 of a social event). The fact that he attended the church functions and allowed his pottery to be decorated with many of the Positivist mottoes showed he was not averse to the teachings generally. The major area of disagreement would have been on the question of Suffrage. Since Positivism was against Suffragism this could have been a dilemma for Harold but this appears not to be the case. The answer probably lies in the fact that women in the Liverpool Church were strong and independently minded and were encouraged to fulfil the talents they had. They were not confined to the domestic sphere if their natural abilities took them out of it. More importantly for Harold the emphasis on liturgical ceremony and drama which dominated the Liverpool Positivist Church probably appealed to the eccentric and fantasy world that Harold often lived in.

His brother Edmund Rathbone was a very committed member of the church. His wife

was the beloved daughter of Albert Crompton who had been head of the Liverpool Positivist Church during the years 1890-1908 and he had been married according to the Rites of the Positivists Marriage Ceremony. Edmund was also involved with the Della Robbia Pottery. A Della Robbia piece was designed by him was exhibited at the 1894 Autumn Exhibition. He was also the architect involved in some of the building schemes, which included Della Robbia Architectural pieces that have already been mentioned. More so than anyone he illustrates the commercial workings of the Victorian and Edwardian art world. This is in the sense the way personal connections and membership of professional organisations provided the much-needed commissions for the artists to earn their living from. As a key figure in the Church of Humanity his connections seem to radiate out from the centre of a circle and link with all the major art organisations of the period.

Ruth Bare's connections to Positivism are very clear, as is also her commitment. The most noted examples representing Positivism of Della Robbia Pottery are predominantly attributed to Ruth. I have also pointed out that there may have been other staff at the Della Robbia who were also members of the Church but since there is no actual membership list this is not possible to verify. There were people like a little known artist who worked at the pottery, Tom Robertson and his sister Miss Robertson. Both were members of the Liverpool Temple of Humanity. I have also pointed out that there were many members of the Positivist Church who were artists but not necessarily at the pottery, like Dora and Thomas Sulman. Ellen Mary Rope was a high profile sculptor who worked on commissions at the Della Robbia. She was not a member of the Church but could not escape its influence and produced a bust of Congrève.⁷⁰

In conclusion it is true to say that the history of Positivists and their Churches of Humanity is normally confined to political or philosophical histories and not to art history. The use of the Liverpool Positivists as a case study on the influences affecting art communities demonstrated that the consequences were more widespread than just confined to the local. Their activities revealed the way in which art communities were intertwined both socially and commercially and most importantly how they obtained commissions. These commissions ranged from the architectural

plans for church buildings right down to small vases as wedding gifts made at the Della Robbia Pottery. One of the most interesting and larger works produced by Harold Rathbone's company was the fountain designed by Thomas Collcutt for the courtyard of the Savoy Hotel in London (see illustration 32). In my efforts to discover more about the fountain I wrote to the Savoy Hotel Archivist giving some information on the date of the fountain and the dates of the Della Robbia Pottery itself. In her very helpful correspondence she commented:

It is very interesting to note that the fountain was made by a brand-new company, rather than a well-established pottery. It is a constant source of amazement to me how often the Directors of the Savoy Hotel Ltd. were open to the very latest design and manufacture, when one supposes they should have been hidebound by traditionalists. However despite the fact that they were pillars of the Establishment, they were constantly open to new ideas, and while the fountain may not be seen to be particularly ground-breaking in itself, the fact that it was allowed to be commissioned speaks volumes.⁷¹

The explanation as to why the Directors of the Savoy Hotel commissioned a fountain from the Birkenhead Pottery is to be found in the way art communities networked. Edmund Rathbone was a committed member of the Liverpool Positivist Church. His friend and head of the Church, Albert Crompton, needed an architect to design his house at Formby Point and Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo was given the commission. Mackmurdo subsequently went into partnership with Edmund Rathbone (Harold's brother). Mackmurdo was related to the D'Oyly Carte family (his wife was a D'Oyly Carte). One of his relatives, Sir Richard D'Oyly Carte, was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Savoy Hotel and he had first employed the architect Thomas Collcutt in 1882 in the building of the Savoy theatre in the Strand. The route of the commission from the directors of the Savoy Hotel Fountain in London to Harold Rathbone in Birkenhead is now patently clear and is a paradigm for explaining the Victorian and Edwardian art network.

In reading private correspondence, diaries and the official Positivists publications, the overriding impression is one of a very close community; a community where moral, emotional and practical support was endemic in the membership. This seemed to manifest

itself in the very narrow or blurred edges that existed between their daily lives and professional lives and philosophical or church membership. The Church of Humanity has been described as a church for depressives. In some cases this could be said to be true but on the whole it seemed to be a haven for those whose beliefs verged on Humanism and which allowed them to practise a religion, that did not include a traditional god as was the norm in Victorian England. This practice, encompassed in liturgy, in art, literature and music, fed and stimulated their artistic natures. In the case of some members like Jane Style it provided the framework into which her intellectual mind and its logic on justice and society were allowed to contribute in a practical way to ameliorate the lot of those who suffered from social inequality. There is a beautiful description of Jane in Otto Baier's Commemoration of her life in which he describes her flowing red hair, determined face and her radical short skirts.⁷² This description is also reminiscent of Cassandra Walker and her flowing Arabic cape. Given the close friendship of Jane with Ruth Bare and Ruth's friendship with Cassandra Walker it is not unlikely that the two women knew each other.

Therefore another of the most important contributions made through analysing the influence of the Positivist Church in Liverpool was discovering the way in which such organisations could provide a support framework for the activities of women workers. This is despite the fact that in this particular organisation there was no official support for Suffragism. However support for Socialism was endemic in the organisation and this served the same purpose for these women artists. No one could argue that the women represented in the membership of the Liverpool Positivist Church were unfulfilled or repressed. Rather they were very much the opposite; well integrated and successful in their chosen roles in life.

Illustration 24. New Years card for 1899 to John Fraser drawn by Harold Bloomfield Bare, Fraser Collection, Sydney Jones Library Liverpool University.

Illustration 25. Black and white photograph of Mrs. Bloomfield Bare, in private ownership.

Illustration 26. Photograph of “Faulkner Street Posatavist,” (the name of street and the church miss-spelt), in private ownership.

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Illustration 27. Scheme for a Church of Humanity in Liverpool, *The Builder* (5th May 1911): 546.

Illustration 28. *Statue of Humanity* taken at an unnamed Mother and Baby Home in Allerton, Liverpool. Photograph courtesy of Joseph Sharples recently of the Walker Art Gallery.

Illustration 29. Sketch of the Della Robbia *Goddess of Humanity, The Sphinx*¹³ (June 1906): 218.

Illustration 30. Black and white photograph of Edmund Rathbone wearing *pince-nez*, in private ownership.

Illustration 31. Photograph of a Positivist ceremony in Liverpool, in private ownership.

Illustration 32. The Della Robbia Savoy Hotel Fountain *The Art Journal* (1898): 223.

Notes Chapter Seven

¹ A history of development of the movement in English society in the 19th century and right up till the demise of the church in the mid 20th century can be found in Wright's book. T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

² The London branch closed in 1932, Leicester in 1910, the revived Birmingham branch lasted for only two years 1938-40 and Newcastle ceased to be effective after the first World War.

³ 15th Annual Positivist Circular, Fraser Collection 986 (25).

⁴ Arlene Reilein, *Auguste Comte* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), 127.

⁵ John Edwin McGee, *A Crusade for Humanity: A History of Organized Positivism in England* (London: Watts and Company, 1931), 96.

⁶ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 28, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London: George Allan 1907), 664.

⁷ Malcom Quin, *Memoirs of a Positivist* (London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1924), 150.

⁸ William Michael Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Intellectual History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1963), 69-70.

⁹ Letter from Elinor Crompton to Sophie Nicholson, January 3rd 1883, Jon Rathbone Private Papers. All the letters referred to in this chapter as being in the Jon Rathbone Papers were copied into books by Grace Rathbone (née Crompton). Jon Rathbone told me he was not certain to what extent his grandmother edited these letters when she was copying them. Undated Newspaper Cutting on the Death of Sydney Style (Died 1930) Otto Baier Papers DDX/118/10; Interview with Dr. Guercio by David Hillhouse at the Williamson Art Gallery in 1974.

¹⁰ An undated letter from a K. Wilkinson of Hope Street Liverpool to Otto Baier commiserates with him on the paucity of numbers at the service to commemorate Congreve, there only being 14 present. Otto Baier Papers DX 118/7.

¹¹ This figure matches the one given by Richard Whittingham-Egan who researched Mary Crompton's murder in 1913 in detail. Richard Whittingham-Egan, *Liverpool Ghosts and Ghouls* (Liverpool: The Gallery Press, 1986), 58.

¹² Otto Baier Papers DDX 118/16.

¹³ Otto Baier, *An Address in Memory of the Life and Work of Jane May Style* (Liverpool, 1938), 7.

¹⁴ For example in a letter to her sister Mrs. Louise Thompson, dated 27th November 1888, Elinor Crompton describes one of their Saturday soirées at which Harold and "our young aesthetic architect friend" were present. Jon Rathbone Papers. However in another letter from Elinor to her husband Albert Crompton she writes "Mr. Mackmurdo came at half past six all ready with his catechism." Letter dated 26th February 1881.

¹⁵ Photo provided by Jon Rathbone from his private papers.

¹⁶ For example a letter from Albert Crompton to his daughter Grace asks how she and Ruth are getting on. Letter dated 20th June 1888. Jon Rathbone Papers

¹⁷ Letters from Albert Crompton to his daughter Grace Crompton written between 1886-1891. Jon Rathbone Papers.

¹⁸ Elinor Crompton's letters to her husband, frequently mention Mrs. Bare being present at the services e.g. 19th September 1884, Jon Rathbone Papers.

¹⁹ The card is part of the Fraser Collection 987 (22). The photographs of Mrs. Bare are in the personal Papers of Jon Rathbone.

²⁰ Letter dated 6th January 1889 to Grace from her father Albert Crompton describes this incident. Jon Rathbone Papers. Mackmurdo wrote a book on Wren's Architecture in 1881. The dates of both the New Year's card and the visit to London are confusing since the Bares are supposed to have left for Philadelphia in 1887 according to Hillhouse. See Hillhouse, *Interim Report*, Section 12. Ruth's own birthday book gives the date for their departure to America as the April 16th 1889 and is in her own handwriting. Bare Family Papers.

²¹ Baier Otto, *An Address in Memory of the Life and Work of Jane May Style* (Liverpool: 1938), 9.

- ²² Many of the letters written by the Crompton family refer to Mackmurdo's visits. Jon Rathbone Papers.
- ²³ Baier, *An Address in Memory of the Life and Work of Jane May Style*, 6.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ²⁵ Letter from Elinor Crompton to her sister Louise Thompson 27th November 1881. Jon Rathbone Papers. "Mrs. Style and I are helping in the forming of a needlewoman's association here. It is much needed. There is an immense body of women here employed as cheap tailors and at shops. They get small pay and long hours and they need something like a union very much."
- ²⁶ Henry Crompton, *Thomas Sulman: A Memorial Sermon* (London: 1901).
- ²⁷ Bernard died in the First World War and Monica married David Ellis.
- ²⁸ Jane Style, *The Voice of the 19th Century: A Woman's Echo* (London: Watts and Co.)
- ²⁹ Wright, *The Religion of Humanity*, 257.
- ³⁰ Style, *The Voice of the Nineteenth Century*, 71.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ³² "The Only True Religion," *Liverpool Review* (24th March 1888): 11.
- ³³ Wright, *The Religion of Humanity*, 82-83.
- ³⁴ McGee, *A Crusade For Humanity*, 129. When McGee wrote his book in 1931 Jane Style and Otto Baier were still alive and the Church was still active. His information about Liverpool came from correspondence between himself, Jane Style and Otto Baier.
- ³⁵ Baier, *An Address in Memory of the Life and Work of Jane May Style*, 8.
- ³⁶ *Liverpool Review* (24th March 1888): 11.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Quin, *Memoirs of a Positivist*, 134 -135.
- ³⁹ There is also another painting, which is the frontispiece to her book, and I am not sure if this was the one used in Quinn's Newcastle church.
- ⁴⁰ Photograph belonging to Jon Rathbone.
- ⁴¹ Wright, *The Religion of Humanity*, 249.
- ⁴² Probate records show that Albert Crompton left Mary £6,639-17-6d when he died in 1908.
- ⁴³ In Sydney Style's Address in memory of Hubert Congreve he says, "In his last letter to me he expressed his interest in our proposed new church, and suggested the style of architecture fitting for its construction." Sydney Style, *An Address Delivered in the Church of Humanity October 29th 1911 in Memory of the Life and Work of Hubert Congrève* (Liverpool: Lyceum Press, 1911), 26. Congrève was an engineer with a profound knowledge of art.
- ⁴⁴ Edmund Rathbone is sometimes described as being in partnership with Edmund Ware and sometimes Frederick Waring. This is particularly evident in descriptions of the architects of the Unitarian Church in Liscard. Pevsner says the architects were Edmund Rathbone and Frederick Waring as do Alan Crawford and the Historic Chapels Trust. The Della Robbia Pottery Interim report and Jeremy Cooper say Edmund Rathbone was in partnership with Edmund Ware. Jon Rathbone in his private papers has the partnership agreement signed between his grandfather and Edmund Ware on the 30th June 1890, the day after a notice appeared in the London Gazette dissolving the partnership with Mackmurdo.
- ⁴⁵ Edmund Rathbone, *Humanity and Art* (Liverpool: Liverpool Booksellers Co. Ltd., undated)
- ⁴⁶ *The Builder* (5th May 1911): 546.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ Joseph Sharples, Michael Shippobottom and Alan Powers, *Charles Reilly and The Liverpool School of Architecture 1904 -1934* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and National Museums on Merseyside, 1997), 104.
- ⁴⁹ Edmund Rathbone, "The Church of Humanity in Liverpool," *The Architectural Review* (March 1911): 148.
- ⁵⁰ Probate records show that Mary Crompton had assets worth £33,323-19-9d at the time of her sudden death in 1913.
- ⁵¹ Otto Baier, *An Address in Memory of the Life and Work of Sydney Style, Apostle of Humanity* (Liverpool,

1930), 19.

⁵²Malcom Quin Diaries in possession of Joyce Quinn 22/2/3 quoted in Wright, *The Religion of Humanity*, 258.

⁵³This is the date given for her murder in Whittingham-Egan, *Liverpool Ghosts and Ghouls*, 58. In Wright, *The Religion of Humanity*, 258, the date of the murder is given as the eve of the opening of the New Temple of Humanity in December 1913. Both the probate records for Mary Crompton and a Report in the *Liverpool Post*, October 8th 1913, on the murder confirm the correct date was 7th October 1913.

⁵⁴The painting is in the *Gemaldegalerie* in Dresden.

⁵⁵John Fraser Collection 986 (42).

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Ruskin, *Works*, vol.30, page xlv; see also James Dcarden, *John Ruskin: A Life in Pictures* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 112

⁵⁸Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo and Selwyn Image founded the Century Guild in 1882. The Guilds productions included furniture, metalwork, wallpaper, enamelling and textiles and it had its own publication, *The Hobby Horse*.

⁵⁹The lectures were titled *Art and the Mind*. 1884 Report of the London Positivist Society.

⁶⁰Letter from Elinor Crompton to Mary Crompton, 7th May 1884, private papers of Jon Rathbone.

⁶¹Letter from Elinor Crompton to Albert Crompton 13th May 1884, private papers of Jon Rathbone

⁶²Some of Creswick's other works include Busts of Ruskin and Mackmurdo.

⁶³Edmund Rathbone, *Architectural Review*, 148.

⁶⁴Williams, *Northern Ceramic Society Newsletter*, 8.

⁶⁵Anon., *The Sphinx* 13 (June 1906): 218-9.

⁶⁶The writer has a family photograph of Edmund Rathbone wearing *pince-nez*.

⁶⁷*The Sphinx* (13th June): 218-219.

⁶⁸See for example Mary McCrossan, *The Letters of W. Dixon Scott* (London: Herbert Joseph, 1932), 26.

⁶⁹Photograph Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, negative number 8891/6653.

⁷⁰I attended an exhibition on the work of Ellen Mary Rope in London in 1997. The exhibition curator, Joanna Barnes, invited me to view a bust of Congrève by Ellen Mary Rope. The bust was not on public display and therefore not listed in the exhibition catalogue. I have been unable to contact Joanna Barnes to find out more of the provenance of the Congrève bust. For more information on Ellen Mary Rope see the Exhibition Catalogue, Joanna Barnes Fine Arts, *Ellen Mary Rope: The Poet Sculptor* (London: Joanna Barnes Fine Arts and H Blairman and Sons Limited, 1997)

⁷¹Susan Scott, Archivist to the Savoy Group in a letter to the writer May 2001.

⁷²Baier, *An Address in Memory of the Life and Work of Jane May Style*, 7-8.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters of this thesis I took some of the major themes which affected the development of artistic careers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and subjected them to analysis in the context of the Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead. Each theme in its own right is enormous and has merited extensive academic research by historians. A serious cause of concern therefore in doing this research was whether it would be possible to say or uncover anything new or relevant to add to the current academic debate in the light of this methodology. Interestingly by using this methodology, that is the application of macro themes (art education; work opportunities; the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement; exhibition practices; Socialism and Suffragism; Comtean Philosophy;) to a micro organisation, far more questions were raised requiring further research, than anticipated. The specific methodologies and theories chosen to investigate these areas seem to have been the key to achieving some success in being able to show that analysis of a seemingly minor organisation has much to contribute towards current academic debate on women's history. Moreover it became clear that that the way in which methodology and theory are applied in research, is of paramount importance, if the object of the research is to contribute to further knowledge in a subject.

One of the most important methodologies used in this thesis was that of the local case study. Local case studies often focus exclusively on the implications for the specific place of the study, as for example perhaps the importance of the Keswick Weaving Industry for the women of that part of Cumbria.¹ However because the research on the Della Robbia Pottery was targeted at the interaction between the local institutions in the context of their interaction with the national institutions, it was feasible that the research outcomes could be relevant to current thinking on these major issues. This was particularly evident in the institutions involved in art education, both for men and women, from the middle of the nineteenth century right through to the early twentieth century. As a result of focusing attention on a small group of women, (and in particular

on Marian de Caluwé) and trying to trace the history of their art education, it became very apparent that Liverpool Art institutions were not the bland, indifferent, talent stifling institutions that historical accounts of the Government Schools of Design all too often depict. Furthermore, the research on Liverpool educational establishments also provided us with a new perspective on educational provision for young girls in the form of the guiding precepts used to set up Blackburne House Girls' School by the Directors of the Liverpool Institute. There is a tendency to ignore this part of an artist's education based on the perception that early schooling does not affect the long-term outcome in art education. The example of Blackburne House showed that the reality is just the opposite. The importance of having forward thinking men, like the Rathbones and George Holt, on local government committees who could influence the direction in which educational establishments were to function, is also highlighted through looking for evidence on educational opportunities in a local setting. These men were imbued with the foresight, ability and will to provide the educational facilities in the fields of art which enabled would-be artists to train for their chosen careers. Their flexible approach to awarding scholarships both in the fine arts and the decorative arts emphasised the importance they placed on future work opportunities. In looking at examination results from the provincial Schools of Art in the South Kensington Scheme it was obvious that they contained unexpected anomalies. One school, which featured as doing consistently well in the examination, was the Warrington School of Art. Research as to why this comparatively small town in the very heart of industrial Lancashire should be perceived as offering a very advanced art education, indicated that it was because it was one of only eight schools in 1863 where the directors allowed nude life classes.² As we know life classes were an integral part of good art training. The importance of enlightened directors is self-evident.

It was not only in the field of art institutions that the application of a local study to a national issue had interesting results but also in relation to the question of work opportunities. This was in the context that in a city such as Liverpool, with a large numbers of students attending art-training courses, there was a corresponding dearth of

opportunities in field of art employment. By being able to focus on an individual workforce, that of the Della Robbia, it became apparent that this lack of opportunities was equally applicable to both the men and the women. The local study was able to demonstrate that the lack of opportunity was not simply a reflection of gender bias, or the control by a patriarchal business community, but simply due to economic circumstances. The businesses needing a workforce with an art training were few and those that did only required two to three designers or artists. It was through the methodology of using a local study that the way in which feminist theory is sometimes applied in research was revealed as to being open to questioning. It was evident from the history of the working lives of the Della Robbia artists that both the men and the women were subjected to failure in opportunities. Moreover their failure was not determined by gender but by economic factors. When the Della Robbia Pottery closed down, alternative opportunities for these artists were limited. The subsequent career of Charles Collis, a very talented and well-motivated man, highlighted the difficulties encountered by men who did not have the finance or the social connections or the support to enable them to succeed. Just as importantly, Harold Rathbone's life illustrated that even with his family background, his financial advantages and his opportunities to access the right kind of art education deemed necessary to succeed (Heatherley's, the Slade and Paris) he failed to obtain the recognition he so wanted; that of fame and fortune as an artist. The lives of two other men at the pottery, John Fogo and Tom Hall, highlighted that although they had the talent and opportunity for a good art education in Liverpool, they could not sustain a living from their art and had to resort to other employment. Much feminist history has tended to look at difficulties encountered by women but this is usually in isolation from those encountered by their male colleagues. Emphasis is placed on the men who did succeed and on the women who failed but rarely on the men who failed and most importantly why they failed. The experiences of the small core of Della Robbia men and women opens up this debate on gender issues and opportunities and points to some unanswered questions.

However the use of feminist models proved to be very useful in its application to questions concerning women in the Arts and Crafts Movement and in exhibitions. In terms of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the influence this had on the advancement of the professional lives of women artists could be tested out against the theory of feminism and the actual reality of feminism in the work place. When a close analysis of the working lives of the women artists at the pottery was undertaken, using feminist guidelines of what contributes towards patriarchy and gender prejudice, then the Arts and Crafts Movement, in this context, was seen as a positive influence. The fact that two well-respected art historians, Anthea Callen and Lynne Walker, advocated opposing views, made a perfect framework in which to test out the component parts of the debate.

Likewise, on the question of exhibitions and their function in determining the outcome on a female career, the feminist theories proved to be the most useful tool in which to approach the research. The use of feminist theories does not imply that any outcomes of research are going to result automatically in evidence to support gender prejudice as a cause in the failure of women to make progress in their professional lives. Examination of the functions of exhibitions in the case of the Della Robbia Pottery female artists and their exhibiting showed there were far more advantages to be gained from exhibiting than from not exhibiting. In the case of the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society their experiences demonstrated that all-female exhibitions were more likely to place female artists in a position where their gender was more easily able to be manipulated and likely to be used against them. It was much better to take advantage of non-gendered exhibitions such as those put on by the Walker Art Gallery. Not only was there an absence of male prejudice (most notably during Philip Rathbone's time) but the opportunities for financial rewards were sometimes much more readily available than at the Metropolitan Galleries in London, the London galleries having a reputation of latent gender prejudice.

One of the most interesting outcomes on the research on exhibitions was the insight it afforded, into the way that artists valued and sold their works. In the past it would seem to me that catalogue prices allocated to works of art have determined the way in which history has interpreted the perception of both the works of art and the artists who created them. The fact that the Walker Art Gallery holds the registers of the sales from its exhibitions has in some ways thrown a new light on this whole area. Given the success the Walker Art Gallery had in attracting exhibits from all the leading artists of the last quarter of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, the registers give a further fascinating insight into the professional lives of some of the most renowned artists of the period, and would merit further analysis.

Some of the most important contributions made in this thesis towards academic knowledge owe their existence to the use of the basic but very important methodology of empirical research. The use of this methodology in the framework of genealogical research, was the pivot on which all the other research in the thesis rested. Initially the caveat in this thesis was that unless biographical information on the artists at the Birkenhead Pottery could be elicited, then there was no thesis. The perception of Marian de Caluwé, as coming from a wealthy French family who lived in the affluent area of Princes Park in Liverpool, was far from the reality of the woman born in the West Derby dock area of Liverpool to a family who originated from Falmouth and a father employed in the Civil Service. However the discovery that one of the most talented artists at the Rathbone's pottery was a local girl, was the catalyst for the detailed examination of her art education. This resulted in the widening out of the bland description attributed to the Della Robbia girls as "locally trained artists." Discovering what a "locally trained artist" meant had very wide implications. This in turn gave rise to the research on all major topics addressed in the research. .

The use of genealogy was also crucial in the research on Comtean Positivism and its influences on the Liverpool art community. Most of what has been written on Comtean Philosophy encompasses the philosophy itself and the biographical details of its main

protagonists. The rank and file membership is usually ignored but this is because the rank and file are just names in isolation from the living persons the names represent. The information obtained on the way art, artists, patrons and commissions were intertwined during this late Victorian and Edwardian period was the direct result of the use of genealogical research. The most significant demonstration of this was the link between the Della Robbia Pottery in Price Street Birkenhead and that of the Courtyard of the Savoy Hotel in the Strand in London.

The tracing of surviving relatives could not have been achieved without the use of this same research tool of genealogy. The most important person to be traced in this way was the great-niece of Cassandra Walker. Up to the writing of this thesis Cassandra's history ended in 1906 when the pottery closed down and "she went to live abroad." Through registers of births, marriages and deaths and crucially through three generations of probate records it was possible (also with the help of serendipity) to finally contact the one surviving person who was able to fill in the missing years of Cassandra Walker's life. The same relative was able to validate the assumptions I had made about her relationship to Suffragism. Other relatives involved, like those of Marian de Caluwé, Ruth Bare and Harold Rathbone, all provided information, which enabled missing links in their biographies to be filled in. These biographical links had implications not just for local history but also for issues relating to the national. I have mentioned serendipity as a useful tool in research. It was also this tool which enabled me to make the hypothetical connections between the Della Robbia Pottery and the important movement of Suffragism as proven fact and no longer just as hypothetical one. The discovery that Harold Rathbone had designed a suffrage banner for the Llandudno women's group acted both as a catalyst and the pointer for the direction of further research.

The final thoughts in these general conclusions must be centred on the individual artists at the Della Robbia Pottery. A phrase used about them in the introduction to this research was "pathetically anonymous, not even having their dates of birth and death

known.” Given the prominence that their work now occupies in English, Irish, Scottish and American museums, the lack of biographical information was somewhat of a tragedy. Cork City Museum will hold a centenary exhibition in 2002 to commemorate the 1902 exhibition and the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum in Birkenhead are optimistic of a 2006 exhibition to commemorate the centenary of the closing down of the Birkenhead Pottery. It is now possible to supply them with biographical details of some of the artists whose work will be on display. Colin Simpson’s wonderfully provocative comment that “we don’t know anything about Marian de Caluwé” is no longer true of her or many of her fellow colleagues.

Notes Conclusion

¹Frederick Benjamin, *The Ruskin Linen Industry of Keswick* (Beckermest, Cumbria: Michael Moon, 1974)

²Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, 176.

Appendix 1. The structure of the Liverpool Institute founded in 1825.

The directors of the Liverpool Institute had all the following organisations under their jurisdiction.

Schools and Adult Education

The High School for Boys (1838-1980s)

The High School for boys was intended to prepare youths for devoting themselves to the business of life or to prepare themselves for more extended study at University.

The Commercial School (1835)

The Commercial School was for the boys of families of more limited means and to offer them preparation for work in trade or manufacturing.

The Queens College (1857-1881)

This was to allow students to study at University level before Liverpool had its own University.

The Girls School (Blackburne House 1844-1980s)

The Girls School was to allow parents to give their daughters a liberal and comprehensive education at a moderate cost.

The Ladies College (1856 no record after 1867)

This was situated in Blackburne House and was for the training of ladies who wished to become teachers.

The Government School of Art (1825 Origins in the Mechanic Institute)

This was to allow students to study and partake of exams as defined by the Government Schools of Design.

The Evening School 1825

The Evening School was to allow those who wanted to improve their education at all levels either for pleasure or vocational needs.

Additional Departments

The Sculpture Gallery (1839-1896)

This contained a collection of ancient and modern art and was available to art students and members of the public.

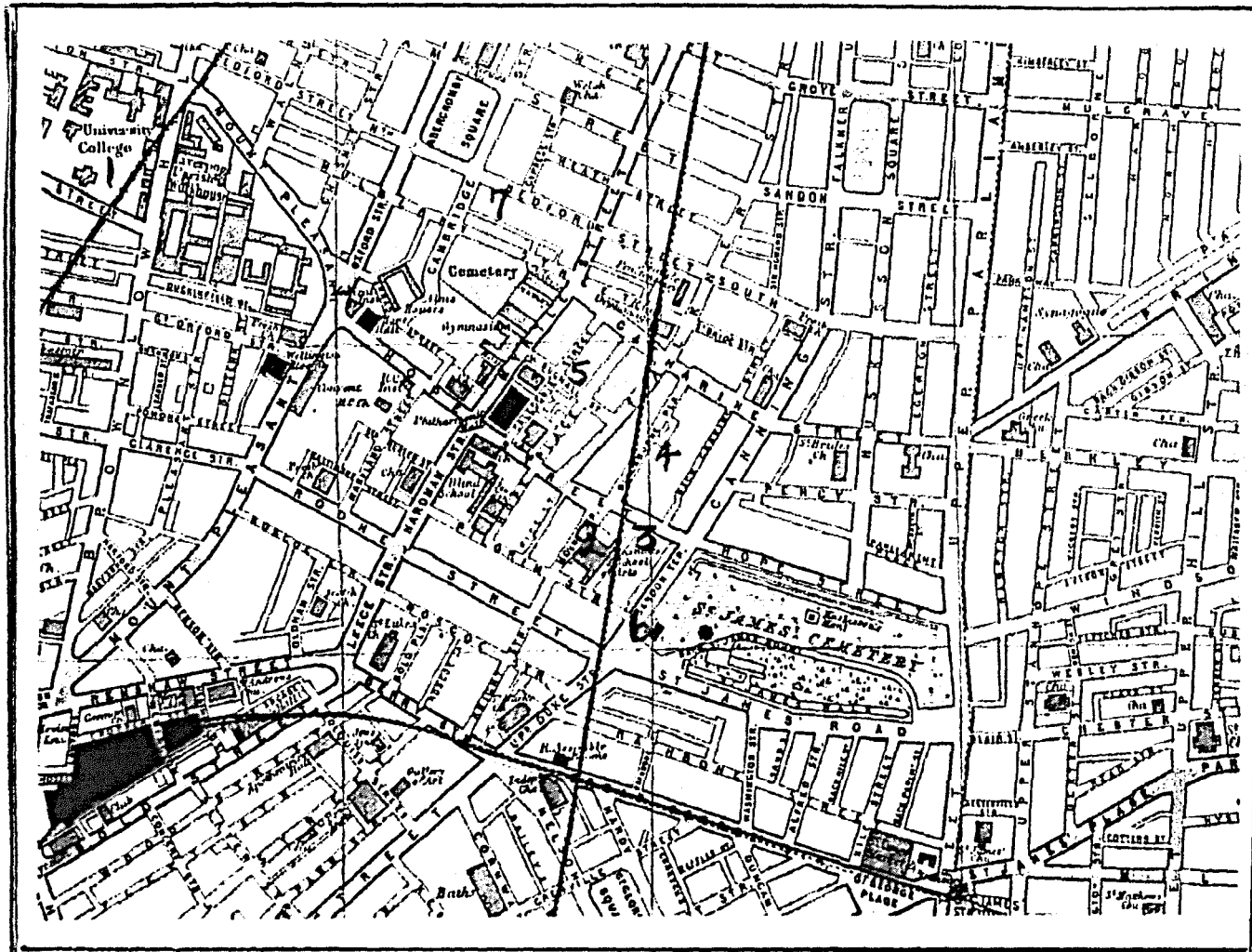
The Library and Reading Room (1823-1908)

This contained 16,000 books and a large selection of newspapers. It was free to the members of the Institute. Non-members were required to pay 10/6d per annum for the use of the facilities.

Members of the Institute

Memberships entitled entrance to all the preceding organisations and in addition entrance to public lectures. Membership fees were graduated for male, female and children from £1-1-0 to 5/-shillings per annum.

1. University College (Art Sheds)
2. Art School before 1882
3. Art School after 1882
4. Blackburne House School
5. Sugnall St. Genn's Home in 1860s
6. Sandon School of Art (1906)
7. Bedford St. Crompton's home



Appendix 2. Liverpool 1895

Appendix 3. List of employees involved in the Della Robbia Pottery at Birkenhead including management and technicians.

| Known males | Unknown males | Known females | Unknown females | Male commission | Female commission |
|------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Ted Ackerley | E. E. | Ruth Bare | A. A. | Charles Allen | M. J. Pollexfen |
| Arthur E. Bells | C. L. | May Barker | J. A. | R. A. Bell | E. M. Rope |
| Tom Bowen | | Annie Beaumont | L. A. | T. E. Colcutt | |
| John Bowers | | Miss Beckett | E. B. | Benjamin Creswick | |
| W. B. Broster | | Gwendoline Buckler | J. R. C. | W. H. Hewitt | |
| Jim Caton | | E. Beaumont | A.D.E. | W. Holman Hunt | |
| Edward Coles | | Alice Cunningham | A.D.S. | Edmund Rathbone | |
| Charles Collis | | Marian de Caluwé | C. E | R. L. B. Rathbone | |
| Emile de Caluwé | | Miss Davis | R. E | | |
| Conrad Dressler | | Miss Evans | E. F. | | |
| W. H. Fletcher | | Susannah Firth | H. G. F. | | |
| John Fogo | | May Furniss | F. H. | | |
| Jack Ford | | Annie Jones | L. H. | | |
| George Francis | | Alice Louise Jones | E. J. | | |
| Tom Hall | | Hannah Jones | P. J. | | |
| D. Holloway | | Aphra Peirce | K. K. | | |
| Jim Hughes | | Lena Peirce | L. F. L. | | |
| John Levy | | Gertrude Russell | L. M. | | |
| Carlo Manzoni | | Annie Smith | E.L.L. | | |
| Harry Pearce | | Edith Trantom | P. M. | | |
| Harold Rathbone | | Cassandra Walker | A.D.S. | | |
| A. Richardson | | Jennie Whitehead | J. S. | | |
| Wilton Ricks | | Elizabeth Wilkins | L. W. | | |
| Tom Robertson | | Annie Williams | W. H.W. | | |
| George Seddon | | Emily Wood | | | |
| Cecil Shirley | | Enid Woodhouse | | | |
| Newman Smith | | Violet Woodhouse | | | |
| C. Taylor | | | | | |
| Tuni | | | | | |
| William Warwick | | | | | |
| Frank Watkins | | | | | |
| William Williams | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| 32 | 2 | 27 | 24 | 8 | 2 |

Information compiled from catalogues of Della Robbia Exhibitions and works in private ownership. One mark not included but found on a piece in private ownership is that of *S de C* which must stand for Sebastian de Caluwé, son of Marian de Caluwé who is not known to have worked at the pottery. Initials are all marks of unknown artists.

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